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SCIENTIFIC METHOD APPLIED TO RELIGION
TRUTH

A NARRATIVE

OF THE
PROCEEDINGS

THE SOCIETY OF BAPTISTS
IN YORK

ON EXAMINING THE
POPULAR SYSTEMS OF RELIGION

STUDY OF THE

IN WHICH IS ADDED,
A BRIEF ACCOUNT OF THEIR PRESENT VIEWS

OF THE
Faith and Practice of the
IN A LETTER TO A FRIEND

By DAVID EATON.

THE THIRD EDITION.

But we have to fear that the friends of the old system are not so ready to give up their views as they are to give up their names. They are not so ready to give up their names as they are to give up their views.

LONDON:

PRINTED FOR AND SOLD BY THE AUTHOR, 157, NEW

ROAD.

1833.

SCRIPTURE THE ONLY GUIDE TO RELIGIOUS
TRUTH.

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IN YORK,
ON RELINQUISHING THE
POPULAR SYSTEMS OF RELIGION,
FROM THE
STUDY OF THE SCRIPTURES.

TO WHICH IS ADDED,
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Faith and Practice of the Gospel,
IN A SERIES OF LETTERS TO A FRIEND.

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"But we desire to hear of thee what thou thinkest: for as concerning this
Sect, we know that every where it is spoken against." *Acts xxviii. 22.*

LONDON:

PRINTED FOR AND SOLD BY THE AUTHOR, 187, HIGH
HOLBORN.

1823.



G. SMALLFIELD, *Printer, Hackney.*

PREFACE

TO

The First Edition.

It may be expected that some reasons should be given for presenting the following pages to the public, especially as it is known by many, that at one period, we were not the most friendly to publications on religion. This arose from the certain knowledge we had gained by experience, as well as observation, that a very improper use is too often made of them, and from thinking that a simple, honest attention to the Scriptures would answer every beneficial purpose; for it is evident that great numbers of religious people, of certain descriptions, do in fact, though not in profession, seek more for a knowledge of their state, and more for assistance and assurance of their safety, from the writings and experience of men, than they do from the Scriptures. Neither is this to be wondered at, when we consider their

ideas of the depravity of their nature, and that the Scriptures cannot be understood without supernatural assistance. However, we can assure the reader that these Letters were originally written at the earnest request of a friend, without any determinate idea of publishing them. Since they were finished, a number of reasons presented themselves which have induced us to make them public. We have been grossly misrepresented. We have been made to speak sentiments which we do not believe. We have been considered as enemies to religion, almost without a hearing. It has been thought that we deny the use of prayer and the work of the Spirit; that we have no experience, are contrary to all men, and maintain that none will be saved but ourselves, &c. That every situation has its own experience is evident to any man who knows any thing. That one situation has not the experience of another, is nothing to the purpose. A doctrine in its own nature is either true or false, independent of the experience either of its friends or enemies. Therefore this objection is too weak to require any farther notice. That none will be saved but ourselves, is a sentiment far too strong to be maintained by any fallible men, however right their views may be. This attaches too much merit to mere

opinions, and is only insisted upon against us for want of better arguments. What any man's final situation will be, we leave to the "Judge of all the earth, who will do right." Without going thus far, we nevertheless do not hesitate to pronounce falsehood to be falsehood, and to maintain error to be error, whatever the consequence of it may be. If a man through blind prejudice, or interested views, harden his mind against conviction, and is nearly determined to be nothing but what he is, right or wrong; or if he, from any worldly motives whatever, scrupulously avoid all inquiry, and will not exercise his mind upon what is truth, "that man shall bear his own burden, whosoever he be."

It is true we do most positively deny that sinners are ever taught to pray for faith as a gift, or for the influences of the Spirit to work in them any such work, as will be seen more at large in the following pages. We there have scripturally considered the subject, and given our reasons for what we say. If in our interpretations we have given the plain sense of the Scriptures alluded to, then the doctrines of Original Sin, the Work of the Spirit, that Faith is the Gift of God, Election and Reprobation, the Satisfaction of Christ, and the Tri-

nity, according to the common ideas, all of course fall to the ground. This is no trifle nor mere matter of distinction, nor is it to be regarded as such; but it is entirely a different system, an opposite view of things; and if what is here premised be true, all the Scriptures brought to support these doctrines are misapplied, the true sense of every text employed for this purpose is perverted. To be at all consistent, this is the only conclusion to which we can come; a conclusion that will equally apply to either side on which the truth may be found.

Should any person attempt to refute what is here advanced; if he can shew it to be irrational or unscriptural, he will have our sincere thanks, he will be attended to in the most respectful manner, and have every acknowledgment made which he can desire. We seek only for truth. We have little honour to lose in the scale of things, and for motives of interest we have none to blunt the edge of conviction. Our own hands constantly minister to our own necessities, therefore in our situation there is little to hinder any argument that is really substantial from being impartially examined. We are fully persuaded that candid discussion is always friendly to truth. But we

cannot consider ourselves answered by ridicule, or by first misrepresenting facts, and then drawing conclusions, a practice by much too common amongst disputants on religion; nor will it at all help the matter to say, that the doctrines here objected to have been sanctioned by time and numbers, and by learned men. No length of time can sanctify error, or convert it into truth; nor can any arguments from numbers be considered as conclusive: they can be used to support a lie as well as truth, and can be produced with much better effect by a Mahometan than a Christian. We want nothing but the plain sense of the Scriptures, and no argument whatever, which is not supported by their authority, will bring conviction to the reflecting mind.

As it is impossible that we should have the least claim to literary merit, being destitute of every requisite for such pretensions, learned criticisms, however just, cannot affect us, because we have no means of judging of them. Ignorant as we are of the rules of composition, this small work was composed after the manual labours of the day, principally in those hours which Nature has allotted to rest. To us it appeared of great importance, and that thought enabled us to surmount all difficulties, and we

are not without some hopes of its doing some good. However, we have used our best endeavours to be understood; if we have succeeded here, our principal intention is gained.

YORK, Goodramgate,

Sept. 30, 1799.

PREFACE
TO
The Second Edition.

THE Author cannot permit a Second Edition of this work to issue from the press, without availing himself of the opportunity of returning his grateful thanks to his friends for the very favourable reception it has experienced. It has been a considerable time out of print. He has had many orders for it which he could not supply. This circumstance, in connexion with the rapidity with which the greatest part of a large impression was taken off, together with the many gratifying testimonies received in its favour, from virtuous and intelligent friends, has induced him to venture on a Second Edition, in the hope that it may be still more extensively useful. The Author cannot better express the favourable sentiments with which it was first received, than by transcribing a letter from the late venerable and excellent Mr. Lindsey, dated Essex Street, January 6th, 1800.

DEAR SIR,

Your obliging thanks for the little assistance I gave in bringing your valuable work before the public

far overpays me, and therefore I shall certainly consider myself your debtor for the 12 copies you have been so good as to send me, which I was glad to receive so early, and could not but take your intention very kindly, though I must refuse your kindness. Without entering into particulars, I must say that your "Narrative," on a deliberate perusal, exceeds the opinion I had entertained from the recital :* the method and good sense that reigns throughout the whole, with such strong appearance of sincerity, must recommend it, even to those who may not agree in sentiment with the writer at first, especially when the whole is considered as the workings of the human mind upon subjects of the greatest importance. You

* The last time Mr. and Mrs. Lindsey visited their friends in the North, ~~on their return from Richmond~~, they staid some days at York with their old and highly-valued friends, Mr. and Mrs. Cappe, and there Mr. Lindsey heard the work read in manuscript, and is the "recital" above alluded to. After which he sent the Author a note, thanking him for the great satisfaction he had derived from it, and begged his acceptance of five pounds towards the expense of printing it. He hoped it would be sent to the press without delay, as it could not fail, in his opinion, of proving highly acceptable, and of doing much service to the cause of rational religion. It was on this occasion, that the Author had the unspeakable pleasure of being first introduced to this great and good man, when his venerable appearance, benevolent cheerfulness of countenance, the simplicity and gentleness of his manners, and his kind attentions, made an impression never to be forgotten; and when that friendship commenced between them which he cannot but deem the honour and happiness of his life, and which continued with increasing affection till his death.

cannot easily conceive the satisfaction I had in first putting your "Narrative" into the hands of some of my most serious and judicious friends, when one of them upon my next calling upon him, expressed himself so pleased with it, and persuaded of its tendency to lead to study and value the sacred writings, that he resolved to give 50 copies to a religious society to which he belongs; and from another friend in the country, I received a letter to order his bookseller to send him down a dozen copies. I wish it may meet with readers who will know equally how to prize it, and then this first edition will not be long in hand unsold. I expect you will soon have an order from Mr. Johnson to send him up some more copies. And I am convinced you cannot have greater satisfaction than in hearing that your book is likely to be useful to many in their most important interests respecting a future world, in which light it is viewed by many.

Believe me,

Your much obliged friend and servant,

T. LINDSEY.

May the Author be allowed farther to express the interest which he feels in the present work, as being, in the opinion of many, peculiarly adapted to oppose the extravagances and enthusiasm of Methodism, and the gross and perverse interpretations of Scripture, which its advocates are perpetually urging in its support, and indeed on which the whole system is built; but also as it bears decisively in his mind on a

point of no trifling importance. It has long been a question agitated between Orthodox and Unitarian Christians, what opinions unbiassed minds would form on an attentive, unprejudiced perusal of the Scriptures, touching the doctrines in dispute between them. Now it is a known fact, which no one can dispute, that the people here described, derived their present sentiments, wholly and solely, from studying the Scriptures. All their prejudices were on the popular side, and so wholly ignorant were they of Unitarians and their writings, that it was not till some years after receiving their present views, that they knew that any person held sentiments similar to their own.

Published by the same Author,

1. Letters to the Rev. John Graham; in answer to his "Defence of Scripture Doctrines, as understood by the Church of England;" and in Vindication of a "Narrative of the Proceedings of a Society of Baptists in York, on relinquishing the popular Systems of Religion." Price 3s.

2. A Familiar Conversation on Religious Bigotry, Candour, and Liberality, humbly intended as a Persuasive to greater Moderation, Union and Peace amongst the Followers of Christ. Price 2s.

3. The True Interests of Religion considered: a Sermon, preached before the Annual Assembly of General Baptists, at Worship Street, London. 1818. Price 1s. 6d.

4. An Essay on the Moral Benefits of Death and Evil, to Mankind. Price 1s.

NARRATIVE,

&c.

LETTER I.

DEAR FRIEND,

IN compliance with your request, made some time ago, that we would give you, in writing, an account of the origin, progress, and establishment of the Baptist Church in the City of York, we have at length prevailed on ourselves, however ill suited our abilities may be to the undertaking, to give, as well as we can, a plain and simple account of the various processes through which we have gone, previous to our settling in our present views, together with some of the principal reasons that have induced us to differ from others. To a mind enlightened by truth, and in love with rational principles, the perusal will not be found uninteresting, especially if it has been bewildered in the same dreary path, and duly considers

the character and situation of the people about to be described.

Figure to yourself a number of plain, illiterate persons without learning, or any of the advantages of an improved education—most of them in the lowest stations of life; journeymen mechanics, with one or two exceptions, thus situated in the mass of society, and, of course, heirs to the prejudices and habits of thought which prevail there, but who, notwithstanding the influence of rooted tradition, and that powerful bias in favour of what is established by authority, by learning, and the sanction of ages, so natural to the human mind, have, by an unwearied pursuit of rational truth, without any patronage, and unassisted by any pilot to guide them in the storm of opposition and perplexity, overcome every difficulty, and now, after suffering much odium and contempt, have rested on the immoveable basis of reason and truth, and you will then see the substance of their proceedings.

While we implicitly receive all that we are taught, notwithstanding the folly and falsehood which may prevail, there is no chance of any improvement, and it is no wonder if opinions are imposed upon us that have neither scripture nor common sense for their support; yet so averse are people of all ranks to change any

sentiment of which they have been accustomed to think well, that it is a work of the greatest difficulty to persuade them to examine into the propriety of what they believe and attend to in religious matters ; and though the fatal effects of this conduct have been seen in the ages that are past, when the errors of Popery universally prevailed, yet people now as much take things upon trust, and as much depend upon others, as if no such evil had ever existed. From a survey of mankind, in this respect, the truth in a great measure seems to be this, that Christianity in some form or other being established in these parts of the world, we are born, as it were, to the profession of it of course ; and though it is obvious, from the opposite and contradictory systems that are built upon it, that error and darkness greatly prevail, yet, without the least inquiry, we receive our fathers' creed, and think we sufficiently shew our zeal for truth, by tenaciously supporting the religion to which we were born ; not considering that, by the same rule of conduct, had we sprung from Jewish parents, we should have been Jews ; or had we entered upon life in Spain or Italy, we should have been Catholics ; or in Turkey, Mahometans ; and should have equally prided ourselves on supporting the religion to which we were born—the reli-

gion of our fathers. But when people are so active and inquisitive in almost all the ordinary concerns of life, where can lie the merit of this implicit faith, or this passive conduct, in matters of religion? a subject which, on all hands, is allowed to be of the very last importance to our present peace of mind, and our future well-being; and yet, without the least hesitation, we trust to others the concerns of eternity, when we would not suffer them to dispose of a few pounds of our money without a proper examination. These remarks seem to us so plain and striking, that any person, with the least attention, must feel their force.

But however general this want of inquiry into the truth of doctrines may be, there are, nevertheless, some remarkable exceptions, and perhaps few that are more striking than that of the people whose religious history we are now about to give.

Without stopping to make more remarks, we shall begin our account by observing, that we were originally of the Established Church, and that we became serious pretty early in life, some by one means, and some by another. We alternately attended Churches and Chapels in all their frequent and varied means of instruction, but principally confined our attention to the preaching of the Methodists; and though

their name then was not so honourable as it is now, yet, regardless of all consequences of this sort, with great industry and the best intentions, we endeavoured to reach to all the great attainments and possessions that their system holds out, rightly judging that the knowledge of the love of God, and the enjoyment of truth, are the greatest of all human blessings. Indeed, all parties equally hold out this good to their adherents ; happiness here, and happiness hereafter, is the end they all have in view, however they may differ, and however ill adapted the means they insist upon may be for its attainment ; and as we sincerely desire not to misrepresent any man's views, we shall state the leading features of the systems to which we attended.

The Methodists, as well as the Calvinists, maintain that we are conceived in sin and shapen in iniquity, in the most literal sense ; that we come into existence with a nature totally depraved, and that the soul is so polluted by original sin and inbred guilt, that man naturally is unable to do a good work, or even to think a good thought ; and in this lost and corrupt situation the pure law of a pure God calls aloud for pure obedience, and threatens, in the most unconditional manner, the soul that sinneth with death, and filleth it with fear and

trembling, and the most awful apprehensions ; that the sentence of the law seizes upon our guilty conscience, and makes it a remembrancer unto us, in whose ample storehouse is laid up all the sins of our youth, and all our follies ; and that when our minds are awakened, it brings them all back upon us with double force, echoing through the miserable soul the wrath of an angry God, and the sentence of eternal damnation.

In this situation, no man can help his fellow, nor even his own soul : here all the strength of man is perfect weakness ; there is no escape, no place of refuge, but in the grace and mercy of God, manifested in the gospel, or in the blood and righteousness of the atoning Lamb.

Under this gracious dispensation, it is believed all are invited to come and take of the water of life freely. The Lord Jesus is represented as standing with open arms, inviting guilty sinners to come and partake of the benefits of his death and sufferings, assuring them that he died that they might live, that he paid the debt due to sin, and satisfied Divine justice, and now all that come unto him he will in no wise cast out ; they are told that they must come unto him by faith, entirely stripped of all dependence on their own righteousness and good works, solely relying on the meritorious

blood of the cross, on that acceptable sacrifice that Christ offered when he offered himself without spot unto God, and by which he purchased eternal redemption for them : and, farther, that that divine faith which saves the soul is the gift of God, and is wrought or implanted in the soul by the operation of the Spirit, by the previous internal workings of which, man is made to see his lost condition by nature, and his need of a Saviour ; that it discovers to the sinner his ignorance and the deceitfulness of his own heart, works in him conviction, repentance, and that holy confidence which enables him to say, that he is passed from death unto life ; that gives him to feel the regenerating influence of the Holy Spirit, speaking peace to his wounded conscience through the application of the precious blood of Christ, which cleanseth from all sin.

By this inward evidence he is assured of the pardon of his sins, and his interest in the love of God : he is now born again, becomes a new man, leads a life of faith above the flesh, and has his affections placed on high, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God ; and that this faith and evidence, which is productive of such happy effects, is to be obtained by attending on the means of preaching, praying, seeking, &c. &c.

This, and much more that might be said to the same purpose, includes the leading ideas of the Methodists. These sentiments were by us cordially believed, and we had no doubt that they were the peculiar doctrines of Christianity, and that, could we only acquire the possession of them, of this work and witness of the Spirit, we should then attain the summit of all our wishes.

For this we attended meetings and sacraments; for this we fasted and prayed to God that he would be graciously pleased to save us, and bless us with the knowledge of his truth; that he would work in us true and saving faith; that he would give us to see the merit and know our interest in the blood of a crucified Redeemer, and were seriously disposed not to desist, till, by happy experience, we sensibly knew that Christ loved us and died for us.

In pursuing this great end, we met with various success, sometimes full of the most pleasing hopes, and sometimes of the most harassing and perplexing fears; and, in the mean time, we were diligent in attending upon preachings, class-meetings, prayer-meetings, &c. &c., as well as the most earnest supplication in private.

In the course of our attendance upon these means, we were, at times, elevated to a high degree, which led us to think we were near

being made happy, and that God was now working in us all the good pleasure of his will; but the strength of these feelings soon failed us, and we were led to conclude they were only momentary impulses, the unavailing effects of our own exertions, and, with no small degree of dejection, we believed we were yet unregenerated, and of course exposed to the wrath of God. This unsettled state of mind was productive of many uneasy days and wearisome nights, and nothing was so much longed for as the happy time when we should be delivered from the bondage of sin, and be brought into the glorious liberty of the children of God.

Thus unpleasantly circumstanced, we went on till the time came when, as we thought, we had attained all we sought for, viz. the assurance of faith, the witness of the Spirit witnessing with our spirits that we were the children of God, and had a saving interest in his love.

Nothing now but heaven and happiness engaged our thoughts, and we most ardently wished that all mankind knew and enjoyed the same blessedness.

Our hearts were now filled with gladness, and our countenances wore a smile of joy; our mouths were full of praise, and we soared on the wings of hope; we saw, or thought we saw, so much of the world to come, that we

were in a great measure resigned either to live or die, to be any thing or nothing, as it should please God. But this season of gladness was not of very long continuance : our ecstatic frames began to fail us ; our glowing sensations lost their fervency and cooled, insomuch that, notwithstanding all our efforts, which were not few, we were again filled with doubts, and began to fear we had been deceived, or that we had grieved the Holy Spirit, and that he had withdrawn his presence from us.

These things naturally led us to apply to the preachers and others for instruction and assistance in this case ; for they, as is usual, had congratulated us on our happiness in being set at liberty, in having the evidence of the forgiveness of our sins, &c. They assured us it was nothing uncommon for persons in our situation to be thus exercised ; that God frequently tried his people, and proved them by different ways ; and, farther, that the enemy of souls would take every opportunity of filling our minds with evil thoughts, and thereby rob us of our joy ; or, that we had been so much elated as to slacken in our attention upon the means ; but that, by-and-by, we should soon feel ourselves renewed, and again enjoy the light of God's countenance.

In these cases, likewise, we took to the read-

ing of the Scriptures for assistance; but here we were not so successful as we could have wished, for we unfortunately read them with the idea already fixed in us, that they were a sealed book, and that we could not understand them except the Spirit opened and applied them to our minds, so that from them we derived little advantage. We were then led to read the lives and experience of those who were esteemed good men, of their trials and their triumphs, how they lived and how they died. Here we felt ourselves greatly interested, and often read with much pleasure and satisfaction, for in them we saw our own likeness, our own experience, and thence took courage. Thus we went on for years, till we came to be not a whit behind the chiefest of our brethren. Although we now somewhat assumed a different appearance, and talked in the language of confidence and assurance, and continued to do so for a considerable time, yet we frequently had our secret misgivings that all was not right, from the fluctuating state of our experience.

This led us to examine more into the truth of the opinions we had adopted, the result of which was, a dissatisfaction with some of our views, and with our situation as members of the Established Church. Though for the present we found little fault with the doctrines,

yet we thought that her practice and discipline were strangely degenerated into a source of corruption.

We perceived that the cure of souls was bartered and bargained for at the expense of better principles ; that it was little more than a trade, a system of revenue and power, where men did not enter upon the ministerial character as being previously men of enlightened understandings, and eminently distinguished for a serious adherence to religious principle, but, that too often persons of immoral character, and otherwise unfit for the discharge of the most important duties, were preferred through the patronage of great men or the influence of friends, from the secondary consideration of providing for themselves and their families.

When religion is viewed in its purity and importance, when it is considered that its concerns extend beyond the personal interests of this life, consequently that all its services and ordinances should be administered with reverence and uprightness, it cannot but affect the serious mind to see a man whose improper conduct, both as a man and a minister, is notorious, with an hypocritical sanctity administer the symbols of the death and sufferings of Christ. Is it to be wondered at if such persons are not particular in their inquiries into

the conduct of their communicants, or that they should be at little pains to press their parishioners to purity of principle and deportment? These bad examples, in such characters, tend too much to fix in the minds of the people a distaste for their whole order, or a belief that an attention upon ceremonies will supply the defects of moral principle and virtuous conduct.

Another consideration that tended greatly to lessen our attachment to the Established Church was, that in her ample inclosure all are considered as Christians, independent of their principles and conduct, thus making a certain form of church government, and extent of territory, the constituent parts of Christianity, instead of the belief and practice of the gospel.

The articles of the Church (not, as it appears to us, very consistently with her government) make repentance, faith, and a change of heart and of conduct, necessary for salvation. But when men come into a state of death, ready to be deposited in the grave, whether they in their life-time were believers or unbelievers, righteous or unrighteous, the minister thanks God for receiving the soul of their dearly-beloved brethren departed, &c., and commits their bodies to the dust, in sure and certain hope of a glorious resurrection.

This practice either is indefensible and stands

for nothing at all, or the way that leadeth unto life is just the reverse of what the scripture represents it. If men can follow the most licentious and abandoned principles, riot in vice and iniquity, be traffickers in human blood, and violaters of every moral duty, Deists, or Atheists, and still be considered dearly-beloved brethren departed, then the way that leadeth unto life is a broad way indeed, and many go in thereat. When we say that these things struck us as gross absurdities, or as something worse, we think we run no danger of incurring the charge of singularity from sober, enlightened people : besides, the doctrines of the Church appeared to us to be Calvinistic, a scheme to which we were at that time rather inclined ; but the idea of Established Churches considering all the inhabitants of the countries under their government as Christians indiscriminately, appeared to us contrary to the genius and spirit of Calvinism, for, in that case, instead of the elect number, or chosen few, we should see elect nations, without any regard to moral appearances—an idea than which nothing is more contradictory to the Calvinistic scheme. These and a number of other things, upon which it is very unpleasant to dwell, made us very uneasy with our condition as Churchmen, and finally led us to bear another character.

One of the strongest reasons which induced us to leave the Methodists, and become Independent Calvinists, was the very great difference that existed between our general principles, and what we observed to take place in the world: for nothing was clearer to us than that all men had not saving faith; and as we, with others, considered human nature as so depraved, that man could not believe of himself, but that faith was the gift of God, and the work of the Spirit, from these premises it was plain to us that, on this scheme, God was partial in his regards to his creatures, and those only on whom he bestowed true and living faith, were chosen to life, while the rest were left to perish in their depravity and their sins.

We were aware some would here urge that man is a free agent, and as life and death are set before him with a will free to choose, or to refuse, if he do not choose life, the fault must be entirely his own: arguments which, in a great measure, must be true, so long as man is considered as a responsible being. But while the total depravity of human nature is believed, so that man naturally cannot have any the least inclination after that which is good, without supernatural assistance, all such reasoning, in our humble opinion, will be found lighter than the dust in the balance. As well may we talk

of a blind man painting a portrait, or any other impossibility.

But to return. These and other arguments that we had heard and read, led us to attend to those scriptures that are supposed to speak plainly upon the subject, which, after much conversation and uneasiness, we had received as so doing, not having been able otherwise to explain them : and though on embracing the scheme of Calvinism as truth, we felt several objections not less hard to be removed consistently with reason and the acknowledged goodness of God, yet we relieved our minds, like others before us, by resolving all into his sovereignty.

As there were a number of us who were friends intimately acquainted with each other, and principally on the score of religion, we often met together, and often talked with each other about our religious experience, by means of which we gained an understanding of each other's situation relative to these things ; and although we did not all alike readily come into these views, yet most of us acted together in them afterwards ; and here we must take this credit to ourselves, that whether we acted right or wrong, we always acted from principle, which led us, as we had made up our minds, to declare ourselves Calvinists, and to consider what steps would be most proper to prosper the same.

After much consultation, (as there were no Dissenters of this sort in this city at that time,) we agreed to form ourselves, in an orderly way, into a connexion upon Calvinistic principles, and sent for a minister from *London*, who accordingly came, and thus we endeavoured to spread, by every means in our power, what we thought was the truth.

Being thus settled in our new system, we now made use of all likely means to acquaint ourselves more thoroughly with the nature and extent of our principles, by perusing the works of different authors, eminent for their abilities, some of whom contended that the elect were chosen before all worlds, out of the pure mass ; while others contended they were chosen after the fall, out of the impure mass ; things, perhaps, indifferent in themselves ; for, upon the whole, it is of little consequence when they were chosen, if they were chosen at all. Some contended that here the elect have positive evidence and assurance of their election ; others, that here they have no positive certainty of this, but only the hope of it.

These, and a number of such doctrines, as electing love, effectual calling, eternal decrees, &c. were attended to, that by proper information we might be able to defend our scheme. In the mean time, our public preaching was well atten-

ded, and our society increased ; a circumstance which to us was extremely agreeable. But now it so happened that some private affairs of our minister made it necessary for him to leave us, and we were once more without a leader ; during which period we had occasional lectures from different ministers, but no one upon whom we could regularly depend. This suggested the idea of applying to *Lady Huntingdon* for a regular supply, which she readily granted. This continued for a considerable time, during which we felt the weight of supporting our minister, and other expenses, to be very heavy, and sometimes more than we well could bear ; yet such was our zeal for the cause, that we made other considerations give way to this. All this time our experience was of a very fluctuating kind, and very often not of that sort which we liked best.

At seasons, indeed, we felt transported with joy at the prospects of the elect, and our hearts bounded with gratitude to God, from the consideration of our being the objects of his eternal love ; but, for a large portion of our time, our experience did not at all answer these views, by reason of which, our minds were often a prey to gloom and heaviness, and we were often led to question ourselves whether we really were of the elect.

As we were not mentioned by name in the Scriptures, we had, of course, like others, to depend upon our evidences, our marks, and our frames. When these were favourable, or when our passions were warmed and affected by hearing sermons or by other means, our hearts were filled with joy ; but when we were dull and languid, they were oppressed with sorrow ; and as clouds and darkness often surrounded us, we were often subject to the most alarming doubts and fears. These circumstances increased our diligence and our inquiries, and, among other subjects, led to the consideration of Baptism, which ended in our obedience to that ordinance by immersion. This last step compelled us unavoidably to break with *Lady Huntington's* Connexion, an event which did not give us much concern, not only as we felt ourselves justified in attending to what we thought right, but, independent of this, as we had a succession of ministers, we were sometimes supplied with young men more distinguished for their ministerial consequence than for their humility and prudence. This step not only made considerable noise without doors, but also occasioned some confusion among ourselves ; for all did not see alike the propriety of the mea-

sure, and besides, our being left again without a minister greatly deranged our proceedings.

We had been baptized by a Calvinist Minister in the West Country, near *Leeds*; to him we had recourse, and he frequently came and preached for us, but it was attended with a very considerable expense, that greatly affected our finances: what was still worse, we were greatly harassed in our minds in those solemn moments of reflection, when we looked at the awful majesty, wrath, and unappeased justice of God, and again at the dreadful condition of the reprobate, inevitably doomed to endless torments for the crime of another. The bare possibility of our being of that unhappy number filled us with little less than horror and despair.

In these seasons of apprehension and perplexity, we relieved our minds by the various maxims which are applied in these cases, namely, That the Lord trieth his people; that afflictions await the righteous; that we must go to the kingdom through much tribulation, and that whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth; that though the enemy of souls, and of the saints in particular, may take every means to harass our minds, and suggest evil things, yet greater is He that is for us than he that is

against us ; and that, in the end, none should be able to lay any thing to the charge of God's elect, &c. &c.

Though these things assisted us, yet so greatly did our fears preponderate, that we tried every means to gain light upon the subject, insomuch that wherever any man was particularly talked of as a fine man, an enlightened man, &c., we were sure to hear him, if possible. Upon these occasions, we not unfrequently went ten, fifteen, twenty, and thirty miles to hear a sermon, and to talk with the minister ; and it sometimes happened, that when we arrived at the place, there was no preaching, which, to men in our situation, was no little disappointment.

We now by some means became acquainted with the works of a *Mr. Johnston*, of *Liverpool*, one main end of whose writings (at least of those that first fell into our hands) was to prove, that both the Calvinists and Methodists were essentially wrong, that their schemes were full of darkness, confusion, and hypocrisy. Such assertions, supported as they seemed to be, excited in our uneasy minds the most painful alarms, and stirred within us every source of anxiety. In the most earnest manner we examined into the difference between his views and theirs. In doing this, we found

that *Mr. Johnston* insisted there was no such thing in existence as a doubting believer, and for a man to be supposed to doubt and believe in any thing at the same time, was a gross insult upon common sense. This increased, if possible, our perplexity, for it directly struck at the root of every religious principle we had hitherto imbibed. Here all our experience was lost ; for if what he asserted with such confidence and plausibility was right, all our ideas were wrong. In our confusion of mind what was to be done ? We referred to the works of those we esteemed excellent men, who had written on the different systems. We reflected upon the different workings of their minds, and the fluctuating state of their experience ; and, although these consultations gave us some ease, yet they could not shelter us from the effects produced by *Mr. Johnston's* reasoning, for in pursuing his arguments, we found he rejected all these authorities, and appealed only to the Scriptures, in numerous quotations from which he deeply intrenched himself.

In following him to these cited passages, we found they always spake with the greatest confidence ; that the first Christians did not run at uncertainties, did not stumble about in the dark, that they were not in doubts whether they were in a safe situation, or whether they had re-

ceived saving faith, or had an interest in the love of God, &c. &c., but that they knew their calling, and were filled with confidence and the most pleasing expectation, and could rejoice in hope of the glory of God without fear.

As these considerations did not at all agree with our feelings, as we often had distressing doubts, we were led to conclude that we had not real Christian experience, that we had been influenced by mistaken notions, and that all was a delusion, so that we were entirely stripped naked as it were, of all our religion, which had cost us so much trouble, and which we had been years in acquiring. We were now brought into as singular circumstances as perhaps ever people were, for we met together confessedly as a set of unbelievers; not that we denied or disputed the truth of revelation, but were ignorant of the faith of the gospel. However, as we were determined to be right, we with all possible attention searched *Mr. Johnston's* writings for that purpose.

But here we fell into a great error, for we followed him instead of the Scriptures, never suspecting, that he who had exposed to our view such darkness, could fail of leading us into the light. This was a great weakness after all we had suffered, for by this measure, we only left one set of men to follow one as fallible as

they had proved. As saving faith was the great object of our concern, we strictly attended to it; and though he severely reprobated the common notions about it; yet he made it, if possible, more mysterious, calling it a divine communication from God, which gave men such positive assurances as precluded all doubts; and to prove this, he almost filled half a volume with texts of scripture, which, to us, afforded the most ample satisfaction. Another of his leading ideas was, that, after receiving his justifying faith, we were constantly to wait and expect the same effusions of the spirit, that the first Christians enjoyed; and he asserted, that since the baptism of the Spirit was first given, there never was a real minister of the gospel who had it not in the same manner. All this, and much more we received, for we attended to his writings as though they had been oracles of infallible truth, never disputing; for we did not examine them to see whether they were true, but in order to understand their sense; pursuing every good they held out, and that for a considerable time, though we never were so fortunate as to attain it.

It is not our intention to trouble you with an account of all this gentleman's sentiments, or to make observations on his ideas of the fall, the nature of the punishment consequent there-

upon, of redemption, the soul of man, and the godhead, &c. &c., which would greatly exceed our intended limits. By the remarks that have been already made, it will be seen how powerfully his reasoning operated upon us, and how far it removed us from the common systems. We shall now, by a remark or two, shew how we left *Mr. Johnston's* principles.

It happened one day, that one of our leading friends was reading one of his works, in which he was attempting to prove that the Spirit was prayed to in the Scriptures. After referring to several passages, he seemed to lay considerable stress upon the apostles concluding their epistles with a benediction for the churches. Although our friend at that time believed the thing true for which he was contending, yet his arguments from the above seemed so forced and weak, that from that time his confidence was shaken, and he rather suspected a like fallacy in other instances. This led to a more strict examination of his sentiments, and the authorities upon which he grounded them ; the result of which was, that his arguments appeared on other subjects, often forced and irrational, and that he seemed as often to misapply the sense of the Scriptures, as those whom he condemned. Thus, by reading his works with other eyes than we had been accustomed to do

for some time past, we lost all confidence ; and as he drew us off from others by exposing their errors and inconsistencies, so by the same discoveries we also rejected him.

We had now raised in ourselves a real spirit of examination, and in all our inquiries we sought after and aimed at consistency. We concluded that truth must be consistent, and that where consistency is wanting, there must be error and darkness. As we had long sought for this in vain in the writings of men, as we had oft with a heavy heart and faltering step travelled through volumes of doctrines, of experience, and of controversy, without meeting with consistency and rest, we now grew weary of the pursuit, and came to a determination entirely to lay aside all men and their books, of whatever sort they might be, and to study and follow the Scriptures only ; which determination we put into immediate execution. We soon experienced the happy effects of a practical adherence to this resolution, for by reflection and attentive reading of the Scriptures, we discovered that faith is not the gift of God, or the immediate work of the Spirit, as commonly believed, but that it comes by hearing, and is the result or effect of evidence alone. Here light began first to dawn upon our minds, and to shed its genial influence over our longing

souls. With joy unspeakable we rejoiced in the freedom of the gospel. We now saw with pleasure that the salvation of God was not involved in mysteries, or surrounded with difficulties; that in order to attain to the enjoyment of it, it was not necessary that we should experience some impulsive workings on the mind, or some unaccountable frames, evidences, or applications, wrought in us by the agency of the Spirit. We came simply to this point: Do the Scriptures contain the mind of God, and does he speak the truth? May he be confided in, or credited? If so, then whatever good they contain, is insured to the man who believes and obeys them with uprightness. By this discovery, we saw that most of our former religious proceedings were labour in vain, being made use of as means to attain an end, to which they were never appointed, but by the wisdom of men, which, without the guidance of scripture, is seldom useful in matters of religion. In short, we saw into the nature of many religious subjects, and discovered them to be very different from what they had appeared before, and we now enjoyed such composure and tranquillity of mind, as, till that time, we were utter strangers to. While, by the operation of rational truth upon our minds, our knowledge increased, our powers expanded, so as more fully

to comprehend the designs and purposes of God, and we were delivered from error and darkness, just so far as we received light and truth from the Scriptures themselves : thus we became rational creatures.

The measure of leaving all men and their books, and betaking ourselves solely to the reading of the Scriptures as our only rule and guide in matters of religion, is to us one of the most memorable events of our lives ; an event which, even at this distance of time, we contemplate with the warmest gratitude, and on which we never think, but with renewed satisfaction. To the rational, reflecting mind, it may, in some sort, shew the powers of the human intellect, of unassisted reason, even in the lowest situations, where there is previously a genuine spirit of inquiry, and an ardent desire after truth, even to the overcoming the force of prejudice, and every other difficulty that may stand in the way.

Our minds being thus satisfied, and now at rest respecting faith and doctrine, we set about forming ourselves into a body upon these principles ; for every honest mind, in all its researches, will ever be careful to combine principle with practice, in order that the good, the substance of all, may be enjoyed. Order and discipline are essential to the existence, peace,

and well-being of every community; accordingly, we laid aside all the articles, creeds, and orders of men, and resolved in matters of church government and discipline, strictly to adhere to the primitive practice of the Apostles, so far as the difference of circumstances would admit. No person, therefore, amongst us, is bound by any law whatever, or called upon to submit to any rule, but what is evidently contained in the New Testament; he may follow any direction contained there, without making a schism in the body.

Following, then, this rule, we found there, and still find, that the very first step any person was called to take after his believing Jesus to be the Messiah, was openly to confess him as such, by being baptized in his name. By this he became a disciple of Christ, and was initiated a member of the Church. And as infant sprinkling is solely a tradition of men, the Scriptures never once noticing it, we copied after the example of the first Christians; and though we know the practice to be now unfashionable, and of course considered as ridiculous and unacceptable to the generality of professing Christians, yet we feel perfectly justified in acting from the superior motive of duty, rather than that of pleasing men; for if we acted to please men, we should not be the servants of

God. But our best apology for being Baptists is, that we find none but Baptists in the New Testament. Our Lord was a Baptist; he commissioned his Apostles to preach it; they were Baptist Ministers, and all that gladly received their word were baptized. But we are wandering too far; we mean not to argue the matter here, but merely to describe our own proceedings. I am,

Yours, &c. &c.

LETTER II.

DEAR FRIEND,

IN the foregoing Letter we have in part complied with your request, by giving you a brief relation of our ideas and experience, and of the sad state of uncertainty we were in during our progress through the different systems we have mentioned. But that you may be better able to judge of the propriety or impropriety of our conduct, we shall recapitulate the leading doctrines we had before embraced, and give some of the principal reasons that induced us to leave them; and though we did not relinquish our former opinions, nor acquire new ones in

any orderly way, but, as we have already observed, first got some light by the consideration of faith coming by hearing and depending upon evidence, yet it appears to us most proper to proceed with our remarks in the following order, for the sake of perspicuity :

1st. Original Sin, and the inability of man to do the will of God.

2dly. The work of the Spirit.

3dly. Faith as the gift of God.

4thly. Election and Reprobation.

5thly. Satisfaction of Christ.

6thly. The Trinity. And,

Lastly, A brief view of our present sentiments.

First. With respect to the transgression of Adam. Various texts of scripture are quoted to prove that its effects upon his offspring are of the most dreadful nature, no less than a total depravity of mind, and a spiritual and eternal death ; or, in other words, that they were made liable to suffer eternal torments. No notion can be more unreasonable and unscriptural than this. The sentence passed upon Adam was, "The day thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die."* Now, though Adam sinned and

* Genesis ii. 17.

incurred this penalty of death, and “that by his offence judgment came upon all men to condemnation, and so death reigned over all men,”* yet this suffering by the fall is chiefly of a corporeal and temporal nature; and though, by sorrow and pain, and the force of bad example, &c., the mind of man may be greatly affected, and he by his disordered passions and propensities, may be hurried into great excesses, yet here is certainly nothing that can imply such a total depravity of soul as that man cannot think a good thought, or work a good work, as is generally asserted to be the natural effect of Adam’s fall.

Another passage brought to this end is from Genesis. “And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. God looked upon the earth, and behold it was corrupt, for all flesh had corrupted his way upon the earth.”† From these, and similar passages, we were fully satisfied of the depravity of the world, not only of the period of which we are now speaking, but of every period since that time. This is never disputed by any one; but our inquiry is, Whether it was, or is, of real necessity the in-

* Romans v.

† Genesis vi. 6, 12.

evitable effect of original depravity, or voluntary? If of inevitable original depravity, then it must have been universal; but there are several strong exceptions to such a conclusion. That it was not universal, is plain; for in the same chapter, ver. 9, it is said, "Noah was a just man, and perfect in his generation, and" that he "walked with God." And again, because God saw him righteous, he saved him in the ark. But if all flesh had corrupted his way so as to *merit* destruction, this implies choice and action, therefore a gradual or voluntary corruption; for God justifies his conduct in destroying them, because of their wickedness: but if it was an unavoidable, natural corruption, they could not help it; and for Infinite Goodness to destroy his creatures for what they could not help, is as contrary to our reason as it is to the declaration of scripture. We there learn that "his goodness and mercy are over all his works;" * that "he doth not willingly afflict the children of men," † but "compassionately considers the feebleness of their frame." ‡ These remarks do not refer to men being brought into a state of death by natural consequence, but to the idea of God inflicting

* Psalm cxlv. 9.

† Lamentations iii. 33.

‡ Psalm ciii. 14.

positive punishments, as in the case of the flood, &c. &c.

From this early period of the world till the time of David, a period of eight or nine hundred years, there is little or nothing urged in behalf of the total depravity of man, even by the friends of the doctrine. In this long period, Abraham is called; God blesses him with great promises, and makes of him a great nation; his descendants go into Egypt, and are there brought into bondage. After a long captivity, they are delivered by the greatest displays of Almighty power. In their journey through the Wilderness, they are preserved and supplied by the extraordinary interposition of the Divine Being: they prove ungrateful, and disobey; and though they have the strongest evidences of God being their deliverer and guide, yet have not confidence and unshaken faith in him. God reproaches them with their ingratitude and unbelief, and destroys them for it before they enter the promised land.

In all this there is not one word of the complete depravity of their nature; they are avowedly destroyed for their disobedience and unbelief: but if they could not believe nor obey, that would have been a plea sufficient in their favour with a merciful and compassionate God; but if it be no plea, then their destruction

justly lies upon God for withholding faith, for not changing their hearts, as they could not do it of themselves; a thought most injurious to the character of a just and good God.

Farther: Their descendants, who entered the promised land, had given for their observance a law, holy, just, and good, the obedience or disobedience to which it was declared should be attended by great temporal rewards or punishments. Moses, their lawgiver, supposes them capable of observing it, by his earnest and pathetic exhortations in which he presses them "to obey God, to keep the law, and to perform all that he had commanded them;"* but says not a word of the total depravity of their nature, or of their inability to do the will of God, but, on the contrary, tells them, that if they did well, it should go well with them, and if they did evil, it should go ill with them: he called heaven and earth to witness that he had set life and death before them, and left them to choose whether they would serve the Lord or not; but if they were incapable of inclining to that which is good, they could not choose the service of the Lord, much less could they serve him.

Again: We are told, that "Israel served the

* See the observations fully confirmed in Deuteronomy.

Lord all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the Elders who lived after Joshua, and who had known all the works of the Lord that he had done for Israel.”* Thus, in pursuing the history of this people till the time of the gospel, we find an account of a great many good men, of their great zeal in the service of God, and their great advances in piety and holiness; also of many bad men, their vice and wickedness, and of the corrupt state of the people as a nation; but these vices are never referred by the Scriptures to the total depravity of their nature by the sin of Adam. The reasons assigned for it in the Scriptures are, “the forsaking the law of their youth,” “going a-whoring after the strange gods of the Heathen,” and neglecting the worship of the Lord God of Israel, “defiling themselves with all uncleanness, and forgetting to do judgment, righteousness, and truth,” &c. &c. These are all voluntary acts of disobedience, and upon this very principle are all the admonitions, threatenings, and exhortations applied. It is true, there are some single texts in the Psalms and the Prophets, which are supposed to speak another language, as when David says, “he was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did his mother conceive

* Joshua xxiv. 31.

him.”* Again : “ The wicked are estranged from the womb, they go astray as soon as they are born, speaking lies.”† Surely such language as this will not bear to be understood literally ; for when a child is born, it cannot speak at all, much less speak lies. If they will bear another meaning, it is neither safe nor wise to oppose single figurative texts to the general scope of scripture, which, in such cases, ought always to preponderate. That these texts cannot establish the notion of a total depravity of intellect, we think must be evident to every attentive mind ; for all the pleadings of David for himself and the righteous, as well as the wicked, proceed quite upon other principles, namely, those of choice and responsibility. They may, indeed, prove the prevalence and extreme danger of early habits of vice, and of great corruptness of principle, or the weakness and sinfulness of the age in which he lived, but surely they will not prove a natural necessity of sinning against God from the womb, so as to be incapable of attending to any thing that is good.

It is contrary to all our ideas of the perfection of God to suppose that he would place or suffer his creatures, by any means, to be

* Psalm ii. 5.

† Psalm lviii. 3.

brought into such a state as to be under an absolute necessity of constantly offending against him, so that their very best works should only be splendid sins, and then punish them everlastingly for it: this is an idea of our merciful Creator, so revolting to the thinking mind as to require the plainest and strongest evidence to support it.

Without stopping to make more observations on the Old Testament, we shall now proceed in our remarks to the New Testament, relative to the same subject. There we find that our Lord considered the Jews as being capable of acting right, and being justly responsible for not doing so. He asks them, "Yea, and why even of yourselves judge ye not what is right?"* In all his ministry he never indicates any such notion in plain terms, never acquaints them with the radical corruption of their nature by the sin of Adam. Indeed, it is hard to suppose that he who was so eminently distinguished for his goodness, tenderness, and moderation, should so severely rebuke the Jews for their blindness, hypocrisy, and disobedience, if he knew that they were under an invincible necessity of being so, through the depravity of their nature. It

* Luke xii. 57.

rather appears, that if he reproached them, it was for the perversion of their dispensation, their misconduct, their insensibility, and wickedness, and their making the Scriptures of no effect by their traditions; for their carnal attendance upon the pure worship of God, and thereby unfitting themselves for receiving him (the Messiah), the end and substance of those scriptures, but he did not reproach them all; of *some* he spoke highly. Whence, then, came this difference? Did their merit consist in their virtuous adherence to the service of God voluntarily, from choice, or was it the discriminating influence of the Spirit on their minds? If the latter, they had no more merit, and were no more the subjects of praise, than those he condemned, since the same supernatural influence which made some good, could equally have made all so, for the difference in that case lay not in them, but in the work of the Spirit; ideas quite foreign to every thing that is recorded concerning them.

In like manner, the apostles, in all their preaching, never tell the people they were so corrupt by nature that they had no power to do the will of God; nor do they ever reflect on them, or upbraid them for their natural depravity; but, on the contrary, they uniformly addressed them as being capable of hearing and

obeying; and when they reject the apostles and their words, they condemn them for it, as being capable of doing better. There are other texts that might be noticed here, but these will fall better under our consideration in the next subject.

Thus it was from a survey of the scope of the Scriptures, which is allowed on all hands to be the only true way of coming at their sense, we perceived that neither Moses nor the prophets, Christ nor his apostles, ever taught the world that mankind are so depraved and corrupted by reason of original sin, that they cannot hear, believe, and obey God. When men attempt to deduce this doctrine from single expressions, and appeal to the bad conduct of men as a proof of the total pollution of their nature, they act a violent and unwarrantable part, which cannot be justified by any fair mode of interpretation. With equal justice might we argue the good side, and conclude, from the good conduct of some, the universal purity of all. All men have their infirmities and weaknesses, but certainly not to this amount.*

* It is generally considered as a conclusive argument, that because all have sinned, all of course are depraved. Suppose this should be admitted, does it prove any more than that all mankind stand in need of mercy? As the apostle reasons, "God hath concluded all under sin, that he might have mercy upon all." But is there the most distant hint given in the

To consider the subject philosophically, or according to the actual state of things. It evidently appears, that men, without revelation, in numberless instances, have maintained a worthy and highly generous conduct, and by the proper exercise of their reasonable faculties in studying the works of the universe, the nature of moral principles, and the powers of the human mind, have been capable of attaining to a high degree of cultivation and virtue; and moreover, that if men could make discoveries in abstruse sciences, and explain other great difficulties in nature, they surely were not under such a natural debility, as not to be able to understand and believe a plain, simple, well-attested fact, revealed from heaven. If men are affected by communications from men, according to their nature, why may they not be affected by communications from heaven, suitable to their nature?

Farther: That human nature, even in its worst estate, has something in it that approves of virtue, justice, and mercy: that there is something in the breast of the most profligate, that feels indignation when innocence and virtue are oppressed. New Testament that man, imperfect as he is, cannot receive the mercy that God has graciously and freely proclaimed for him? Surely not.

ture suffer unjustly, or are treated with cruelty; that the most vicious and abandoned of men, in their moments of reflection, give the preference to purity and goodness, and most ardently wish they had been such, rather than what they are, cannot be controverted. But if man were unable to incline to that which is good, these things could not be; however, as they are true in fact, they cannot be false in religion. There is not a profligate or libertine to be found, but that, if he had an aged parent, or helpless infant, whom he tenderly loved, to settle in some family, he would place them in a virtuous one, and not in a brothel, though the latter he loved best for himself. In support of this principle, we could produce a number of illustrations, but we think more would be unnecessary.

From these and similar considerations, it appeared to us, that the depravity of the human mind by original sin, is unsupported either by scripture or reason. This doctrine, however, is the ground-work of many popular doctrines in the orthodox systems of religion.

From this is inferred, that man has no power to do the will of God; hence arises the supposed necessity of the work of the Spirit, that faith is the gift of God, &c. &c.; but as the doctrine itself is not founded in truth, all that

is built upon it is of the same nature; for if the premises are false, so are the conclusions,* as we shall attempt to shew more at large in another Letter.

Yours, &c. &c.

LETTER III.

DEAR FRIEND,

THE doctrine of the Spirit next claims our attention; a doctrine so intimately connected with the subject considered in the foregoing Letter, that, however they may be distinguished, they are not to be separated. The work of the Spirit upon the mind, in the view of religious people of the Calvinistic persuasion, is so plainly and clearly revealed in scripture, as to be the life and spring of the whole;

* As the New-Testament preachers never, in plain terms, assert the radical corruption of man by Adam's sin, so that he cannot be influenced by motives to do any thing good, any more than a dead man can rise and walk; this doctrine is supported only by inferences; and as it is a gross reflection upon the Deity, as well as a libel upon human nature, there is the best ground to suspect that the arguments are fallacious which are adduced in its support; for what is it but an attempt to prove by reason, that reason itself is corrupt, and thus to invalidate their own argument?

and hence they infer the total depravity of human nature, that thus made it necessary. Thus they first labour to prove the radical corruption of man by nature, to support their notion of the prior work of the Spirit upon the heart; and, on the other side, taking it for granted that the work of the Spirit in their sense is scriptural, conclude that man must be very corrupt indeed, to make such a work upon the heart necessary. By this notion of the Spirit influencing and pervading the whole religious economy of the world, man is reduced, notwithstanding his boasted powers of reason, to a mere cipher, a passive instrument, fought for, and alternately possessed and used by God and the Devil; and as the one is weakened, the other prevails. Besides the absurdity of making the Devil nearly equal with God in the contest, and thereby exposing revelation itself to the unjust aspersions of the gainsayer, the reasonable powers of man are lost sight of, and the scripture doctrine of man's responsibility, appears with the most harsh and unjustifiable aspect.

However, we shall proceed to review the subject, and give our reasons for what we say; but it will perhaps be hard for you, or any person, not under the same previous influences, to conceive what difficulties attended this

part of our progress. Our minds were so immersed in the commonly-received notions, that long after we saw into their fallacy, we were frequently taken by surprise with a number of texts, as we supposed them to be, because commonly quoted as such, that bound our minds and cramped our reflections; which, however, upon close examination, were found to have no existence in scripture, but to owe their being to Catechisms, Common Prayer-Books, and other works of men; expressions that are not suspected, because commonly used.

But we wish to observe, lest we be misunderstood, that we do not intend to deny that God can assist his people, or to dispute the propriety of their praying for, and expecting such assistance; by no means, for this the Scriptures teach us to look for, and represent it as our duty, as well as our privilege, to make use of every means that the Father of mercies has afforded us. The spirits of all men are in his hands; in him we live, and move, and have our being; he can change, impress, and affect them according to his good pleasure; he can work by means unseen by us; he is the Governor of the World; natural or providential circumstances, and the relative conditions of human life, are the instru-

ments of his power, as well as the ministry of the word, and the energy of his spirit. In short, the Christian is encouraged to pray, and to pray in faith, for the "eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayers." The drift of our reasoning is directed against the common belief, that men are so depraved, that they can neither desire nor believe the gospel, without the prior work of the Spirit upon the heart. On this we have carefully searched the Scriptures, and do most positively assert, that they contain no such doctrine; and we farther assert, that no man can read the New Testament with the least attention, and maintain or give one example from thence of our Lord ever, on any occasion, instructing unbelievers to pray for faith, or for the internal evidence and operation of his spirit, to enable them to believe, but that he uniformly calls unbelievers to believe on him whom the Father hath sanctified, and sent into the world. All the works that he did were for this end, to establish his character as the Messiah, not that men might pray and wrestle for the inward evidence of the spirit, but that men might believe that he was the Christ, and, by believing, have life through his name.

Speaking to the Jews, he says, "If ye be-

lieve not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins ; and where I am, there ye cannot come.” What language is this for the mild and compassionate Jesus to make use of, that if the Jews did not believe, they should die in their sins, and lose happiness, if, at the same time, they had no power to believe, without the prior work of the Spirit ! And how could they seek for it when they were told so to do ; or how could he command them to pray to God, that he would give them to know their interest in Christ, when they did not believe in Christ, and more especially, when he knew their hearts were so corrupt that God could not hear them ? When the Jews, through blind prejudice, did not believe on him through his word, nor yet through the works that he wrought, they were considered as disobedient, stiff-necked sinners, and threatened with an exclusion from happiness. But surely this evidently supposes that they could believe and attend to his words, or where would be the justice of the threatening ? Our Lord uses such expressions as these : “Come unto me all ye that are weary and heavy laden, and ye shall find rest to your souls.” “He that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out.” “Ye will not come unto me, that ye might have life,” &c. We could not see the pro-

priety of this manner of speaking, without supposing that men could come unto him, and could believe on him. The language and spirit of his preaching is not that ye must pray for the work of the Spirit, that ye *cannot believe* or that ye cannot come unto me, but that ye *will not* believe, that ye will not come unto me.

We could not think that the sacred writers would say, "He that believeth not shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him;" "he that believeth not is condemned already;" "he that believeth not maketh God a liar, because he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son," &c. &c., if men were not able to believe. This would be condemning men for not doing what was not in their power to do. With these views, we could not consider God either good or just.

It is exactly the same on the other side of the question: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved;" "he that believeth shall be saved," "hath eternal life," "is born again," "is a son of God," "shall inherit the kingdom," &c. &c. We could not, nor can we now see the propriety of exhorting men to believe, and telling them they shall be saved by it, if to believe was not in their power, but the gift of the Spirit, and depending upon another, not on themselves; and we

have already said they were never taught to seek it by prayer, &c.

Farther: in examining the ministry of the apostles, we never found them instructing the people that faith is a gift, that they must pray for it, or that they must have the influence of the Spirit to enable them to believe, to reveal Christ in their hearts, or to apply his atoning blood to their sinful conscience, according to the language commonly used by modern preachers.

From time to time we have had much conversation with religious people, and with ministers not a few. During these conversations, we constantly urged, that as they would not, as honest men, recommend any thing in matters of salvation without having good scriptural authority for it, we hoped they would give us their authority for their using such expressions as we have just mentioned, namely, *where* unbelievers are taught to pray for the influence of the Spirit, or for the gift of faith, &c. — when, after an unpleasant pause, they have answered, they thought there were plenty of such texts, but that, just then, they could not recollect them. This was, and is, the common reply; and though we allow them ever so much time, still their memory fails them: and no wonder; for that man must have a notable memory in-

deed, that can furnish him with passages which do not exist! No; the apostles always addressed men as rational creatures, capable of understanding, believing, and obeying what they preached. We confess, that in following the apostles through all their travels, looking carefully at what they preached to all sorts of people wherever they came, we could not, nor can we, find one instance of their ever telling their hearers to pray for the influence of the Spirit, the gift of faith, &c. Alas! then, what numbers of sermons have been, and are, constantly preached, which answer no purpose but to delude and mislead the hearers! This cannot be considered as a simple error, or a trifling difference of opinion; for hence arises that middle character of people, called *Seekers*, who are very numerous in some connexions. These *Seekers* are a new character, and not to be found in the New Testament; there, all are considered either as believers or unbelievers, saints or sinners. In the New Testament there is no middle character, no medium. These *Seekers* are a compound character, said to partake of both, but are completely neither. This is a novel improvement on the apostles' plan, the ill effects of which are, that, on this principle, thousands of ignorant, though serious and well-disposed, people, are set to seek, for

months and years, often with tears and a heavy heart, for the gift of faith, for the marks and manifestations of their interest in the love of God, by the assurance of the Spirit, consisting in some rapturous emotions, or energetic workings upon the mind, the great uncertainty of which, with the fluctuating state of the experience and of the mind, makes this work of seeking to be attended with the most painful anxiety, so much so, that great numbers of serious people may date their sorrows from the time they became religious, so tortured have they been between the contending passions of hope and fear, or of hope and despair; and perhaps the instances are not a few in which they have finally fallen into a total derangement of the understanding. However, to support this strange, unscriptural doctrine, the teachers of it misapply a number of texts, though not intentionally, citing every passage that has the least appearance of countenancing their views, without paying sufficient attention to the natural meaning of such passages, and they confound all the distinctions the inspired writers have made, in this case, between the saints and the world, by indiscriminately applying, either to believers or unbelievers, those scriptures that are addressed only to the churches.

Now, whatever is addressed to saints or believers, cannot surely be applied to any other of opposite character; but when they are addressed to characters to which they do not in truth belong, then their meaning is prostituted and their design lost. In these respects, we found religious people greatly erred from not understanding, or not attending to, the particular character of the persons to whom these scriptures were addressed.

Believers, or disciples, are encouraged to pray by every argument or figure of speech, and are as constantly enjoined to pray in faith, or they have no assurance of receiving what they ask from God. Unbelievers are considered as "wicked men," those that "make God a liar, because they believe not the record that he gave of his Son." They are considered as "enemies to truth," to "be of the world," those "that do not please God," &c. &c.; of which number all are considered who pay no regard to religion, though they may have the name.

If "the prayers of the wicked are an abomination to God;" if "whatsoever is not of faith be sin;" if "without faith it is impossible to please God;" then it is no wonder that unbelievers are never taught to pray by the apostles, for "the Lord heareth not sinners."

Their constant theme was, "Believe on the Lord Jesus, and thou shalt be saved." But the advocates for unbelievers' seeking the Spirit and faith by prayer, bring a number of texts to prove their doctrines, which we shall now notice. The first and principal is from our Lord's Sermon on the Mount. "Ask, and it shall be given unto you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: for every one that seeketh, findeth; and he that asketh, receiveth; and to him that knocketh, it shall be opened." Now the question is, Who are here addressed? for whoever the persons were to whom our Lord speaks, these instructions belong to them, and to none else. The Sermon begins thus: "And seeing the multitude, he went up into a mountain, and when he was sat, his disciples came unto him, and he opened his mouth and taught THEM." For any person seriously to consider the sublime truths these chapters contain, and suppose them to have been spoken to the unbelieving multitude, who neither believed on him nor regarded his authority, is perfectly absurd. However, it is plainly expressed that they are the disciples who are here taught to pray, those who believed on him, which is consistent with the whole chain of scripture, and not unbelieving Seekers; therefore this proves nothing to

their purpose. The parable of the unjust Judge and the importunate Widow, is much used to encourage the Seekers. But this, unfortunately for them, is as unfriendly as the former; for it is not spoken to unbelievers, but to the disciples, for their support, by shewing them that God will not be unmindful of his people. It concludes thus: "And shall not God avenge his own elect?"—his servants, and not unbelieving Seekers.

The following passages are supposed to be decisive upon this matter: "No man can come to me, except the Father, which hath sent me, draw him."* Here, without taking the context into the account, it is inferred that no man can come to God, unless he be inwardly wrought upon by the Spirit—a conclusion perfectly arbitrary, and which is not expressed. Our Lord goes on to observe, "It is written in the Prophets, And they shall be all taught of God. Every man, therefore, that hath heard and hath learned of the Father," (viz. by the teaching of the prophets,) "cometh unto me." If the character and works of the promised Messiah had not been described by the prophets, how could the Jews have known by their Scriptures who he was? But as these characters and

* John vi. 44.

these works were described, all who loved and attended to the prophets could know the Messiah when he made his appearance, by his character and works answering to the description there given of them. By means of the prophecies, men could learn of the Father, and to them Christ refers his hearers. "Search the Scriptures, for they are they that testify of me, or else believe on me for the very works' sake." If his miraculous works were not to prove him the Messiah, for what were they intended? Or how can we prove him the messenger of God but by those means? All this amounts to no more than that men were drawn to Christ by the writings of the prophets, which described his character and works, which proved him to be the Messiah, *i. e.* by the power of evidence, of motives, and of ordinary instruction; all which supposes that men have power to attend to them.—"Without me, ye can do nothing."*

This passage, by modern preachers, is used to shew that man can do nothing profitable in religion without the inward assistance of the Spirit. It is really astonishing how men can impose upon themselves so, when, by a very little attention, they may see it means no such thing. In this passage, our Lord, in highly

* John xv. 5.

figurative language, tells his friends, just before he leaves them, “that he is the true vine, and that they, as branches, cannot bear fruit, except they abide in the vine; for without him they can do nothing,” or bear no fruit as Christians. He could not mean, that without the energy of the Spirit they could not believe, for they were believers and apostles already. Besides, he is not speaking of the natural powers of man, but of the holiness of life and usefulness of conduct that his gospel would produce in them, if they did not abandon it, but abode in him.—“To be carnally-minded, is death; but to be spiritually-minded, is life and peace. The carnal mind is enmity against God, for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be: so, then, they that are in the flesh cannot please God.”* It is a plain truth, that they who indulge in the lusts of the flesh, cannot please God, and that the carnal mind was, is, and always will be, at war with the spirit of purity. All this is self-evident, but it is little to the purpose. It is not here said that man is under a necessity of thus being carnally-minded, or that, if he is carnally-minded, he cannot turn from his evil ways and receive the mercy of God. The following passage is nearly

* Romans viii. 7, 8.

similar: "But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned."*

True, while the natural or sensual man only seeks the indulgence of his sensual appetites, he seeth not, nor careth for the things of the Spirit; they are foolishness unto him, or of no account. But here the question returns again, Is he compelled to do the lusts of the flesh? Cannot he repent and become a good man? Cannot he believe and obey the gospel? Or where is it recorded that man cannot repent, and believe, and obey God?

"For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance, as ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sake."† The same apostle has a similar passage to the Corinthians: "And my speech and my words were not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of man, but in the power of God."‡ It appears to us, that these passages have no allusion to an inward work of the Spirit upon the mind, but to the entrance of the apostle

* 1 Cor. ii. 14. † 1 Thess. i. 5. ‡ 1 Cor. ii. 4, 5.

among those people when he first preached to them. He here calls their attention to the circumstances in which he first made known the gospel to them, that it was not in word only, but with the power of working miracles, which they saw, giving such demonstration of the Spirit as gave them much assurance that he, the apostle, was the true messenger of God; and thus their faith did not rest on the wisdom of man, nor on his words only, but in the manifested power of God.

As the end of miracles was to establish the gospel, it is obvious that this is his meaning, and it is altogether conformable to the rest of the apostle's preaching. Our Lord assures his disciples, that, if he goes away, "he will send them the Comforter, who, when he was come, should reprove the world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment." It is generally read, *convince* the world of sin; and as all are not convinced of sin, the Calvinists consider this passage as relating only to the elect world, and then they urge it as being decisive that the Spirit is appointed to work in the minds of men conviction for sin. But they ought to know, that by the law is the knowledge of sin,* and not by the work of the Spirit. Sure-

* Romans iii. 20 ; vii. 7.

ly there is a great deal of difference between reproving the world of sin, and convincing it. We may reprove a person for sinning, and not succeed in convincing him. But Christ went away, and the Comforter came; the apostles received him on the day of Pentecost, and he by them reproved the world of sin, in crucifying the Prince of Life, their promised Messiah, as an impostor, by the outward evidence of miracles and tongues in his name, and not by any inward working in the Jews. Besides, when our Lord made this promise to the disciples, he tells them the world could not receive it. How can men reconcile their creed with this declaration? Unbelievers, in this, as well as in all other parts of Scripture, are called the world; and yet it is strangely contended that unbelievers, in the first instance, must seek for the Spirit, when our Lord asserts, as above, that the world cannot receive it. Now, they must admit one of these two things,—either that unbelievers are not the world, or of the world, unscriptural as it is; or, that their systems, in this respect, are in flat contradiction to our Lord's affirmation.

There is one passage more that we had nearly overlooked, upon which is laid the greatest possible stress. It occurs in the conversation held between Nicodemus and our Lord: "The

wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit." It must be allowed that there is some difficulty attending these words; the language is highly figurative, and not easy to be understood. While it is almost generally thought, and confidently affirmed, to assert that man is changed, renewed, and born again by the inward operation of the Spirit upon the soul, there are others who think that our Lord alluded merely to that extraordinary effusion of the Spirit which the disciples received at the day of Pentecost, whereby they fully opened and established the gospel or spiritual dispensation, into which the Jews were born, by their receiving him as the Messiah, and were thus delivered from the law of commandments contained in ordinances, &c. &c. Be this as it may, no candid mind would wish to build any doctrine upon one dark passage, for this text has not a parallel in all the New Testament. We think it much the fairer way, when a dark passage occurs, to explain it according to the obvious sense of those passages that speak plainly on the same subject, and which is surely more reasonable than to put such a sense upon it as best suits our own scheme, and then to resolve all the plain texts

into it, because they do not otherwise agree with our sentiments. By this rule, then, we are not confined to this dark passage, nor to any single passage, to know the scripture sense of the new birth. The Scriptures frequently speak of it, and consider all as being born again who receive the gospel, or this spiritual dispensation in the love of it; all who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and work righteousness, as appears from the following texts: "For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus;" * "being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever." † "If ye know that he is righteous, ye know that every one that doeth righteousness is born of him." ‡ "Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ, is born of God." § Paul tells the Corinthians, he had "begotten them again, through the gospel." || Peter tells the Christians, "they were begotten again, through the resurrection of Christ from the dead." ¶ These passages, surely, speak sufficiently plain, and are easy to be understood. There is no allusion to any inward dark work upon the mind, to any secret whisperings, or private interpre-

* Gal. iii. 26.

† 1 Peter i. 23.

‡ 1 John ii. 29.

§ 1 John v. 1.

|| 1 Cor. iv. 15.

¶ 1 Peter i. 3.

tations; on the contrary, they affirm that the man who sincerely believes the word of God, and embraceth Christ, with all his affections, as the Messiah, is born again by faith: by believing the gospel he is begotten again to a hope of life, i. e. a new scene opens to his view, he now acts upon new principles, is inspired by new motives, he has new pursuits, and new pleasures, and his affections are fixed upon new objects. In truth, he is, in all respects, a new man; old things with him are passed away; and the more he is influenced by these prospects, and beholds the glories of the world to come, the more he is alive unto God and dead to the vanities of this world, over which he gains a victory, even by his faith, i. e. faith in a future life, as revealed and exemplified by Christ.

Again: "The manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal."* There are few texts more perverted than this. The apostle is here speaking of the miraculous gifts of the Spirit, and in order to quell that envy and confusion which prevailed in the Corinthian Church respecting them, assures those to whom he writes, that these gifts were not given for any individual aggrandisement, but for the

* 1 Cor. xii. 7.

edification of the whole body. For example: Supposing a member possessed the gift of tongues, it was not for himself nor for them that believed, but "for them that believed not," that they might be converted to the gospel. But instead of applying the text in this rational manner, according to the apostle's meaning (viz. to those possessed of gifts in the Corinthian Church,) it is applied to all mankind in general, and hence concluded that every man in his natural state has a measure of the Spirit given to him to profit withal. This is so obvious a perversion of all that is said or intended, that it seems unnecessary to say any more upon it.

Lastly, It is contended by some that the extraordinary gifts of the Spirit are still the privilege of the real Christian, and are to be expected and enjoyed through the exercise of faith and prayer. This is a consideration of some importance, and as such we shall offer upon it a few remarks.

In the first place, the baptism of the Spirit was not originally received by this means: the first Christians did not expect it, nor seek for it, through the exercise of faith and prayer; it was a free gift given them by Heaven to answer a certain purpose, and generally was received by the laying on of the apostles' hands. Cor-

nelius and his friends received it while hearing Peter preach, even before he had joined the Church by baptism, so that he had no opportunity of seeking it by any means whatever.

Secondly, When we see the use and propriety of any subject proposed to us, we feel a double pleasure to what we do when we only receive or assent to any thing as being true, merely because it is revealed as such, without seeing its utility. This observation applies in a striking manner to the subject before us. We are told that the gifts of the Spirit were given to comfort the disciples' minds, to lead them into all truth, and to aid the spread and confirmation of the gospel. But before this last end could be effected, when the state of the apostles' minds is considered previous to their illumination on the day of Pentecost, we see not only the use, but the necessity of the assistance of the Spirit; for they, in common with the rest of their countrymen, were filled with the idea of a temporal Messiah, who should assert and establish the independence of their nation, raise it to splendour and dignity, and reign gloriously upon the throne of his father David; and though their Master had told them plainly and repeatedly, that "his kingdom was not of this world, and that he should be taken from them," "be delivered to his enemies, and be

by them crucified, and that the third day he should rise again," &c. &c., and though they saw all this actually take place, yet "they trusted that it had been he who should have delivered Israel;" * and though he rose from the dead, according to his declaration, while he was yet with them, they still did not understand, but inquired if he would "at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel." †

With minds thus prejudiced, it was impossible they should preach to others what they themselves did not understand. But supposing they had applied themselves to the understanding of the true nature of the Messiah's kingdom in the most earnest manner, and supposing they had all made equal progress, a supposition extremely improbable, a great part of their lives must have been consumed before they, by the usual operation of common principles, could have been fit to preach it to the world; and this delay would have been attended with this great additional disadvantage, that the facts and circumstances which had excited so much attention, through length of time would have died away; or, what was still worse, would have been unsupported by evidence. But in the course of their studies, had

* Luke xxiv. 21.

† Acts i. 6.

any of them so misapprehended the truth, that they became not of one mind, and all did not speak the same things, then, of course, all would have fallen to the ground. To say nothing of the support of which the first Christians stood in need, to be able to abide the fiery trials that awaited them, we see the absolute necessity of the baptism of the Spirit, to enable the apostles to take advantage of all recent circumstances, and without loss of time to preach the gospel with effect to the sons of men. It enlightened their minds, and gave them such an understanding of their Master's work and character, and of the nature and spirit of the dispensation, that from the day of Pentecost they totally abandoned all their ideas of a temporal or worldly Messiah, and devoted themselves entirely to the work of the ministry, to the glory of God, and the good of men.

Thirdly, The gifts of the Spirit were not given to produce moral effects in those that received them, farther than that in proportion as the mind is enlightened and established in truth, the stronger its confidence, and the fairer its prospects will be; and thus it will be furnished with stronger motives to purity, virtue, and benevolence. That motives only influenced the minds of the first Christians in common concerns, though baptized with the

Spirit, is abundantly evident from their conduct. We find the apostles frequently using very strong language, when reproving some of the early Christians for acting inconsistently with their hopes and calling, and in a manner unworthy of their privileges. This plainly shews that the Spirit did not produce in them any moral effects in an arbitrary way: from all which it appears that the extraordinary gifts of the Spirit were sent to enlighten the apostles' minds, to enable them to open the nature of the kingdom of the Messiah, to make known the good-will of God to his creatures, and to confirm it to them by the most positive and striking evidence.

We apprehend these were the plain ends for which the spirit was given, and these ends were all clearly effected; and as they are, by the blessing of Divine Providence, handed down to us in a plain, convincing manner, if we attend to them in light and uprightness, we shall feel an equal interest and enjoyment in the advantages of the extraordinary gifts of the Spirit, with the first Christians, though we receive them not in the same manner. The difference, upon the whole, between them and us, may not be so great as is imagined, especially, as one end of the gifts of the Spirit, not mentioned here, was to give satisfaction to the dis-

ciples' minds, that Christ had entered upon his reward: the outpouring of the Spirit, according to his promise, afforded the completest evidence that he was now seated on his Father's throne, and partook and dispensed of his fullness, and in this particular we, of this day, have equal advantages. But if, after all that has been said, people will still contend for the same blessing in the same manner, they must give the same evidence, shew the same signs, work the same miracles, before they can be credited or listened to with attention.

Yours, &c. &c.

LETTER IV.

DEAR FRIEND,

HAVING in our remarks upon the doctrine of the Spirit asserted, that faith is not a supernatural gift, as is generally maintained, we shall now make some observations on those texts that are supposed to speak that language.

“By grace are ye saved, through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not of works, lest any man should boast.” The apostle, in this connexion, endeavours to im-

press the minds of the Ephesians* with a sense of their great obligations to God, in their being saved from a state of gross ignorance and vice, solely by his mercy, and urges it upon their attention that they were saved, not by works, or any purity, or exertions of their own, but tells them, “by grace are ye saved, through faith,” or believing, “and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God,” and you enjoy it freely by believing it, or receiving it by faith.

The words in the text, “it is the gift of God,” refer only to grace, and not to faith; for believing is only the channel or means by which the grace of God is received, or conveyed into the heart. This seems plainly to be his meaning, and it is perfectly consonant with the rest of the Scriptures; that the gospel, or salvation, or the grace of God, or eternal life, is the gift of God, but men are saved by it only as they believe and obey it.—“To another, faith by the same spirit.”† The Corinthian Church possessed extraordinary gifts of the Spirit, for the edification of the body, and for the spread and establishment of the gospel; but, through the envy of some, and the imprudence of others, much confusion had been bred in the Church. The Apostle, apprised of this,

* Ephesians ii. 8.

† 1 Cor. xii. 9.

interferes, and gives them some useful instructions for the right use of these gifts, shews them the impropriety of their former conduct, and gives them to understand that these gifts were not dispensed for any individual distinction, but to be subservient to the propagation of the gospel. "For," says the Apostle, in this same epistle, "tongues are for a sign, not to them that believe, but to them that believe not."

The text under consideration refers to that extraordinary gift of the Spirit that enabled the possessor thereof to work miracles, as will appear more evidently if we follow the Apostle's reasoning into the next chapter, where, speaking of charity, he says, "And though I had all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and had not charity, I should be as nothing;" which demonstrates that he refers to that peculiar faith, that supernatural impulse upon the mind, which seems always to have preceded the working of a miracle, and which was the immediate gift of the Spirit, and not to that faith or belief which constitutes a man a Christian. That he did not mean faith in the common acceptation of the term, is evident, for this the Corinthians already possessed as a body, and this therefore could not be the cause of their difference; hence it appears that this

passage is nothing to the purpose, that it does not apply to the subject. But if it be still insisted upon, then we come to this conclusion, that the rest of the Church, even those who possessed extraordinary gifts of another kind, for equally beneficial purposes, had not saving faith, though members of the Church, and thus illustriously distinguished; a most absurd conclusion indeed, and which certainly proves too much.

“Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith, or belief of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead.”* The Colossians are here assured, that as they have been buried with Christ, by the figure of baptism, so by the same figure they may consider themselves as risen with him from the grave through their faith in the power of God. The operation of God here spoken of has not the least allusion to any work upon the mind, but to the energy or power that God exerted when he raised Christ from the dead, and which to them was a sure evidence of their own resurrection. It is somewhat strange that any thinking person should infer that the operation of God, in rais-

* Coloss. ii. 12.

ing Christ from the grave, was an inward work of faith in the believing Colossians.

“For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake.”* Any person paying the least attention to the context, will readily see that the Apostle is encouraging the Philippians to bear up, and not to be afraid of their persecutors, and that he speaks here, not of faith, but of sufferings, and seems to mean no more than this, “you are not only called upon, or have an opportunity given you to believe, but also to suffer for his name; therefore be not ashamed, nor afraid of the testimony of our Lord.” But suppose, for argument’s sake, that faith is here called a gift, by the same explanation, suffering is a gift also, for believing and suffering are exactly parallel expressions in this text. What is the natural conclusion, but that the cruel persecutions of the Church, which originated in the malice and rage of their enemies, are transferred from them to the Holy Spirit; thus making the wickedness of evil men, and the sufferings of the innocent Christians, equally the gift of the Spirit with believing. Surely this reasoning is too gross for any sen-

* Philipp. i. 29.

sible person to admit, for suffering is never reckoned among the gifts of the Spirit. Thus having noticed the principal texts that are commonly brought to prove the sentiments we are now combating, we shall beg leave to add, to what has already been said, a few general remarks.*

The doctrines that man naturally cannot think a good thought, or work a good work, without the previous work of the Spirit on his

* Upon reviewing the foregoing, we find that we have unintentionally omitted two passages of scripture, which are adduced to the same purpose, though, as it appears to us, with less plausibility. Heb. xii. 2: "Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith." It is evident, from considering the context, that the Apostle means no more than that Jesus was the person whom the Father chose to be the first publisher of the important doctrine of a future life, and to confirm it in his own person by rising from the grave. These words can never be fairly construed that faith comes in consequence of any internal workings of the Spirit. This sense can only be discovered in them by those who are previously determined to believe the doctrine.

The second passage is James i. 17: "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above," &c. This text can have no force, if faith be not considered as the gift of God; and that it is not a gift, we hope we have in this letter sufficiently proved. From the context it cannot be made to appear that James considered it in this light. Neither of these passages, indeed, claims any notice here, only so far as it is desirable that no occasion should be given to assert, that we have wilfully omitted any text, generally quoted in defence of the doctrine we wish to oppose.

heart; that the Spirit is offered and given for this end; that "faith is the gift of God," &c. &c., seem to us, 1st, Contrary to the known powers of human nature.—2dly, To all our ideas of the justice and goodness of God.—And 3dly, To all the principles upon which he has ever revealed himself to his creatures.

First, Contrary to the known powers of human nature. For it appears that man, by virtue of his reasonable faculties, is fully capable of understanding any truth or fact that is plain, clear, and evident, whether natural or revealed; and farther, that he is capable of being affected with those truths, or facts, according as they respect his situation; that he can be wrought upon by circumstances or representations, whether good or bad; that his affections are more or less pure or impure, according to the nature of the objects upon which they are fixed; that men are naturally filled with gratitude, love, and admiration, when they behold and benefit by disinterested goodness in their fellow-creatures, and that these sentiments lead them to act agreeably to the dictates of these obligations, to discharge or return them, if possible. If man can feel and act in this manner, man with man, how much more so with God, on whom he continually depends, in whom he "lives, and moves, and has

his being," who constantly supplies all his returning wants, and from whom are all his future expectations! Here is a far greater force of obligation, that will, of course, when rightly attended to, produce much stronger feelings, and naturally excite an earnest wish and endeavour to return or acknowledge them.

Again: it is evident that man is so constituted at present, that his ruling passion is self-love, and that self-preservation is the first law of his nature, as well as that of all other creatures. If danger threatens and approaches him, his first concern is to look for a way of escape, whether the threatening danger be of this world, or of that which is to come. Only let him see it, and make him sufficiently sensible of it, and it will, on these natural principles, and in this rational way, as effectually work upon his mind as the common notion of the work of the Spirit. It is true, indeed, that opposite influences may so fully possess the mind, as to prevent these things from producing their natural good effects. But then this remark holds equally good on any scheme; for few will argue that even the Spirit works *irresistibly* upon the mind. In short, the hope of reward and the fear of punishment, but principally the latter, are the great operating principles upon the mind of man.

Secondly : these doctrines are opposite to all our ideas of the justice and goodness of God. It is an established sentiment among mankind, that the Deity is possessed of all possible perfection, consequently that he is both just and good. But that which would be unjust and unworthy in a good man, and disgraceful to him as such, cannot be just in God. To suppose that God brings man (the most distinguished of his lower works) into existence, or that he suffered him by any means to be brought into existence, under a necessity of continually sinning against him, without being able to stir hand or foot in that which is good ; and that, in this situation, God should make it his duty, and call upon man to obey him with uprightness ; that it should be his duty to love God, when, at the same time, it is impossible for him to do it ; to hear and believe in God, yet that he has no power to hear and believe on him ; and that, nevertheless, God will severely punish him for his disobedience, as the Scriptures abundantly declare ;—such conduct seems to us utterly unworthy of the justice and goodness of God, and fills us with horror and disgust. He that can believe such things of an infinitely good and perfect Being, let him believe them. Sure we are, that if any man was so severely to punish any of his helpless family, or depen-

dent creatures, for not doing what was impossible for them to do, he would, upon reflection, seem a tyrant to himself, while he appeared a monster to all around him. But, on the supposition that God has given sufficient evidence of his goodness to entitle him to the trust, the love, the obedience of all his creatures, and that he requires nothing of them but what they are able to do, then all these hard views of the Deity vanish from our minds.

Thirdly: these doctrines are contrary to all the principles upon which God has ever revealed himself to his creatures. The Scriptures constantly represent to us that it is man's greatest happiness, as well as interest, to obey God; that he, of all others, is the only object worthy of his supreme consideration and affection as a rational being; that God is able to make him the best, the wisest, and the happiest: thus, if possible, to attract him by the most endearing views, by laying hold of some of the strongest principles of his nature; for surely it is one of man's first desires to be happy. This is his first and last concern, his earliest hope, his latest prayer, his constant pursuit through life; and whatever he understands will most ensure him that end, that he will unceasingly pursue, if it be through ten thousand difficulties. The principle of interest

is likewise appealed to,—that principle which so powerfully sways and influences the human mind. The Scriptures, as above noted, offer the greatest good, the greatest advantage, here and hereafter, to godliness; they shew “that it is profitable to all things; having the promise of the life that now is, and also of that which is to come.”

Again: God has constantly revealed himself as the future dispenser of equitable rewards and punishments. This can never agree with the idea of the total inability of man to do the will of God; for he that is accountable for his actions must have the liberty of acting, or his actions are not properly his own, and he cannot be punished for them upon the principles of justice. The Scriptures are express on this subject, that “every man shall be rewarded according to his works.” What we do by invincible necessity are not voluntary works, and cannot, by the above rule, subject us to pain or punishment. Yours, &c. &c.

LETTER V.

DEAR FRIEND,

THE doctrine of Election we believe to be plainly revealed in scripture, but from this we

draw very different conclusions from those that are too often drawn from it. We proposed to give you our reasons for relinquishing one doctrine and taking up another. We shall still adhere to the same rule, only we must remark, once for all, that we do not pretend to enter at large into these subjects, or to say all that might be said upon every single text. This would be tedious for us to write, and too dull for you to read. We shall merely give some of our principal reasons, and what we think supported by the sacred writers.

When we take a view of the great leading principles of the Scriptures, we find, whether we consider them from the end to the beginning, or from the beginning to the end, that Christ, in a certain sense, is the substance of all. In him all the purposes of God were treasured up; all were revealed in him. "He hath made known the will of the Father: all the promises are yea and amen in Christ." "He is the head of all things to his church;" "is heir of all things;" "has a name given him above every name." "He is the only way of access unto God," and, without controversy, is the first elect of God; whom "God gave a ransom for all, to be testified in due time;" "whom he hath set to be a light to the Gentiles;" and "given" (not to a few, but) "for

salvation to the ends of the earth, that all flesh might see the salvation of God."

We shall notice some of the most striking instances of election. The first is the call of Abraham. Was he chosen from his country and his father's house, that he only should be blessed, and his country and his father's house left to perish? No, this is not the account, but just the contrary, viz. that in him, and in his seed, "all the families of the earth might be blessed." The calling of Abraham seems to have been from a most benevolent design, that, in making of him a great nation, the name and government of God might be known and preserved throughout those early, dark ages, when the knowledge of his providence was in danger of being totally lost, till such time as his purposes should be more fully opened. The call of Abraham, then, all the circumstances considered, is a most striking instance of *election*. The end of his calling, as avowed by God himself in the promises made to him, shews that it was not, as has been observed, for his particular good, or for any confined purpose, but in order that all the families of the earth might be blessed through him. Let it here be observed, that as this is the great ground-work or cause of all the peculiar privileges and distinctions that were conferred upon Abraham's

posterity as a nation, or upon any family or individual thereof, these privileges and distinctions ought all to be referred to the same principle, all being subservient to the same end. Following, then, this fair consequence, we can easily account for the different discriminations of character that took place among the Jews. If Isaac, the heir of the promise, had two sons, and the promise was to run in one only, it was solely at the good pleasure of God in which it should be. Jacob was not chosen for his goodness, nor was Esau rejected for his wickedness; for before the children had either done good or evil, God, according to his own good counsel, chose Jacob and rejected Esau; preferred the younger to the elder, that his purpose might stand without the aid of human sagacity, for probably Isaac would have chosen the elder. This choice seems not so much to respect the individuals as their posterity; for, respecting any worldly prosperity, Esau seemed as great a man as Jacob; and with regard to their felicity in another world, even if they had known any thing about it, the good of both (according to the promise in which *all* were to be blessed) was equally considered.

As to the case of Pharaoh: that he was not a vessel of wrath, appointed by the decree of God to destruction, but that he fitted himself

by his iniquitous treatment of the innocent Israelites, appears from the apostle's account of the matter; for he says, "God endured with much long-suffering the vessels of wrath," &c. Now for God to endure what he himself appointed, implies a contradiction. It should rather appear that their destruction was not decreed but on account of their impenitence, and that they could, and had time to repent, through "his long-suffering of them," or why this expression? However, be this as it may, it is plain their punishment was of a temporal nature, and did not refer to a state of suffering after death, for about this they knew nothing.

As among the Jews a number of persons were elected for particular purposes, we deem it unnecessary to notice them all. Let one instance suffice as a specimen of all the rest. Jeremiah was chosen from the womb to be a prophet; not that he only should be saved, and the rest left to perish, but it was for the general good: "that he might speak unto the house of Israel all the words of the Lord, that they might be saved," which is the proper end of all prophets and of all messages, to save and do good, if they are attended to. The whole nation of the Jews, the offspring of Abraham, though abounding with obnoxious characters, were considered as "the chosen of God,"

“the peculiar people of God,” “the elect of God,” “those only whom he had known of all the nations of the earth.” But this evidently referred only to their national advantages, to their temporal privileges as a people, and, chiefly, because “unto them were committed the oracles of God.” As respected futurity, they knew little or nothing about it; and when they grievously sinned against their God, he destroyed them, and delivered them to their enemies, who led them into captivity, &c. In short, they were no more than instruments in his hand for the good of the whole world.

The apostles were chosen “before the foundation of the world” to be “able ministers of the New Covenant,” not for any individual, exclusive benefit to themselves, but that they might “preach the gospel to every creature,” and carry the glad tidings of salvation to the four corners of the earth. Much more might we add to the same purpose, as “that Christ died for all,” “gave himself a ransom for all,” “gave his life for the world,” “tasted death for every man,” &c. &c.; which inclines us to believe that it is the will of God that “*all* should come to the knowledge of the truth, and be saved.” We rejoice in the consideration, that the time will come when it shall be fully seen that all the peculiarities of character, gifts,

and callings among men, had an immediate reference to this great end.

All who believe the radical corruption of human nature, contend that man is so helpless that he can desire nothing that is good, so that the first inclination or motion to that which is good, is as much the work of the Spirit upon the heart, as what they call sanctification and persevering grace. It plainly follows by this rule, that all serious characters, of whatever denomination, have been equally wrought upon by the Spirit, are all equally the elect, for they could not of themselves, by the force of any motives whatever, change their old conduct for a better. What is the consequence? Plainly this, either that the favour of God is far more extensive than their scheme admits, or that the Spirit, which was given, at first, to lead into all truth, and of course led all in one way, and to be of the same mind, now acts quite differently, by leading men into error and contention. One is now drawn to be a Methodist, another a Calvinist, and a third a Quaker, and so on; all led and converted by the same Spirit, for it is already settled that they could not change themselves.

Thus, instead of the Spirit leading into truth, to be of the same mind, and to walk in the same way, it is made to be the author of con-

fusion, by leading men to think and act quite differently, and to oppose one another with strife and bitterness. But "God is not the author of confusion, but of peace," and cannot produce in men, what is so opposite to himself. But it is affirmed, that these differences are from the bewildered imaginations of men, and not from the Spirit of truth. In that case, then, who are right; who are the elect? They are not mentioned by name in the Scriptures, and all these different religious characters lay equal claim to the same things, profess the same marks and inward evidences, and have the same moral and religious rectitude to support their pretensions. From the confusion, darkness, and contradiction that reign in the different prevailing systems of religion, it is most reasonable to conclude, that the Spirit of God has nothing to do in the matter, and that men are what they are by their education, by the operation of circumstances, or from the different religious instruction imparted to them: for if they were led by one spirit of truth, and all drank at the true and only source of religious information, the Scriptures, they would be of one mind in all great leading truths, for "Christ is not divided." There is one fact that had on our minds decisive influence, which is, that the apostles make no such dis-

tinctions, they do not use such language as modern preachers, who harangue upon provision being made for *part* only, of Christ dying for the elect only, &c. &c., and surely their example ought to be of the first authority. These preachers readily confess that they do not know who are, and who are not elected; they invite all, press all to come in general terms. But whilst thus employed, they ought to recollect, that, according to their scheme, the inability of man is such, that he cannot attend to their admonitions. On their own principles, therefore, they labour to no purpose, as the Spirit only can quicken and bring in the elect.

But it is urged by some, in the justification of this proceeding, that the Spirit may make use of them as instruments for that purpose, a supposition which is not authorized by their system, so that it must be confessed there is a degree of uncertainty in it which ought not to be; and it is well known, that a great many of them have the most serious scruples on this head, and, that not a few able Calvinistic Ministers have entirely left off calling sinners to do what they could not do, judging that work to be the peculiar province of the Spirit. Surely a doctrine of such importance as the reprobation of a great part of the human race, ought not to stand upon inferences, however

strong, or on single passages that may well bear another meaning. The doctrine is so unworthy of a good God, and so dishonourable to him, and of such importance to men, that it ought to be supported by the clearest and most indisputable evidence; an evidence that all might see and feel, before it be admitted as a truth.

But the advocates for the doctrine in question, lose the pain that naturally fills the feeling mind in reflecting on the consequences of their system; namely, that the greatest part of the human race are brought into existence without any will of their own, and by a chain of fixed events, or by the effects of Adam's sin, (a crime they had no concern in,) hurried through life to eternal perdition, independent of their good or evil conduct, by virtue of eternal decrees, by considering themselves as being safe, elected, and born to eternal joy. And though unpleasant misgivings may at times disturb their peace, yet they stifle the voice of reason and of humanity, and ease their minds by contending that God, as a Sovereign, has a right to do as he pleases, as if there were a necessary connexion between absolute sovereignty and merciless power. It is true, indeed, that among men these characters are too frequently united; but we know that

the Scriptures uniformly speak of God as being “good unto all,” and declare that “his tender mercies are over all his works,” that “he is kind to the evil and to the good,” and is perfectly amiable beyond all our conceptions. God being perfectly just can do nothing unjust: if he has predoomed a great part of his creatures to destruction, *that* may be right; but is it right to sport with their miseries, and to insult them in their low and fallen condition, by calling them to believe this or that, to believe and obey his will, or be damned for not obeying, when he knows that they have no power to comply with the smallest injunction? Is this right, or good, or just?

These observations are not the effects of prejudice, but the result of very serious inquiry. Many of us were once firm believers in this particular scheme, and to be consistent with ourselves, considered the helpless infant of the non-elect, who died at a week old, as being equally an heir of hell and of eternal torments as the old and grey-headed sinner, who went laden with iniquity down to the grave; for if men are condemned by eternal decrees, neither years nor crimes make any difference. Men are too apt to speak of God as if he were actuated by such passions as too often sway themselves; but it is good for us that “his

ways are not as our ways, nor his thoughts as our thoughts." The difference is immense. It is certain, that "God is no respecter of persons," but has good-will towards all men; and there is no evidence, either from scripture or reason, that any of the human race shall be lost in eternal perdition by virtue of eternal decrees. The first wish of every feeling parent is for the happiness of his offspring. The whole race of men are the offspring of God; and if he were only as good as men, depraved as they are represented to be, the spontaneous desires of his heart (speaking after the manner of men) would be for the eternal happiness of all his creatures.

Yours, &c. &c.

LETTER VI.

DEAR FRIEND,

THE next subject on which we proposed to treat is the doctrine of the Satisfaction of Christ, and how much soever it may be extolled by its friends, there are no such words as "the satisfaction of Christ," or that "Christ died to satisfy Divine justice," or, "that he paid the debt due to sin for us," or, "that he died in our stead," or, "that he by his sufferings reconci-

led an angry God to his offending creatures." We repeat it, there are no such words to be found in the New Testament. We know, indeed, that there are a number of texts cited for the purpose of proving this doctrine, but upon close examination we found that, in fact, they neither speak the same language nor the same sentiments. For example, where can any man discover in the New Testament, that Christ by his blood quenched the flaming justice of God; or that he died in our stead, or by his sufferings reconciled his angry Father to his offending creatures? &c. &c. The generality of religious people are so accustomed to hear these sentiments, that they never dispute but that the Scriptures are full of them. It would lead us far beyond our design to enter into a minute examination of such texts as the following: "Christ died for us," "was sacrificed for us," "bore our sins in his own body upon the tree," "was made sin for us," "ye are bought with a price," &c. &c. They are in a great measure figurative, and are borrowed from the ceremonial law of the Jews, or from the Jewish Scriptures. It is urged that the expression of "Christ bearing our sins," has a pointed allusion to the scape-goat under the law, which bore away upon his head the sins of the congregation of Israel into an unknown land, and

that, in the same manner, Christ by his gospel bears away, or removes the sins of the world; and in confirmation of this idea, it is said, that when our Lord was healing all that were sick, the evangelist applied it as a fulfilment of the prophecy of Isaias the prophet, "himself took our infirmities and bare our sickness." Now, it is plain, he did not bear the palsy, fevers, and other disorders, in his own person, in their stead, but that he removed them; and, that these were merely figurative allusions to practices mentioned in the Old Testament, will further appear, if it be considered that there are a number of texts in the New Testament that cannot be understood but in this mode of interpretation: as for instance, "Ye are bought with a price." If we are to suppose either God or Christ the buyer, and his blood the price with which Christians are bought, the question will be asked, Of whom are they bought? To say that Christ, by his sufferings, bought them of himself, is nonsense; that he bought them of God is contrary to all scripture language, which invariably says, that "he brings us to God," "redeems us to God," &c., and not of God. Some enthusiasts, indeed, will say, that "he bought them of the Devil," and thus make God bargaining with him, as it were, for the deliverance of his own creatures

from death, and thus exalt the Devil to be nearly as powerful as the Deity. This, surely, is too absurd to deserve any attention. How, then, is this language to be understood but upon the principle above stated? The very idea of Christ dying to appease his angry Father, or to satisfy his injured justice, represents God in an odious point of view—as so inflexibly austere that he would remit nothing, but would have the uttermost farthing, a character that is detested amongst men; while God the Son is represented as compassionate and merciful, and every way amiable, enduring so much to appease the wrath of God and to save sinners. But are not God the Son and God the Spirit as pure and holy as the Father? Consequently, must not they equally hate sin, and be as justly offended at it? And who is to satisfy them? Or if they be considered as being all one God, then God the Son died to satisfy himself, which is absurd to suppose.

Again: If they be all one God, then the Father must have been as merciful as the Son, and did not want satisfying. But it is argued by some, that Christ is only considered here respecting his human nature; while others consider him as properly God and Man, making one Christ, and that nothing less would atone to Infinite Justice for infinite sin: to say

nothing of the absurdity of supposing a finite creature capable of committing or doing any thing infinite, or of the great injustice of God's punishing *any* of his creatures in a future judgment, after he had received infinite satisfaction for *all* offences. When we have asked the friends of this doctrine, if God really bled and died for the sins of the world, they have been obliged to pause till common sense came in to their relief. Seriously to assert that the Deity, who is an immortal, infinite, incomprehensible Spirit, could bleed and die by any means, much less by the violence of men, atoms of the dust, is too monstrous an assertion to be seriously believed even by the greatest enthusiast. If the Godhead, then, did not suffer, it was only human nature that suffered; and could human nature, however pure, that is only finite, by any sufferings, render an infinite satisfaction to Infinite Justice? No, it is a plain contradiction. But some are fond of extolling the justice of God at the certain expense of his other perfections. But, surely, without going so far, God has not forgotten to exhibit proper views of his justice. Let any man dispassionately consider the destruction of the world by the deluge of waters; of Sodom and Gomorrah, by fire from heaven; of Pharaoh and his host in the Red Sea; of the Israelites in the Wilder-

ness, for disobedience; of the nations of the Canaanites, for their idolatries; and lastly, the destruction of Jerusalem and the dispersion of the Jews, with a number of other facts that might be mentioned,—and he will see that God has not left himself without witness on this head, but “has gotten himself a name through all the earth,” and “is greatly to be feared.”* But when we add to these, the general judgment to come, “when all flesh must appear before the judgment-seat of Christ,” when the wicked will meet with a righteous sentence of condemnation, of everlasting punishment, he will surely find that God has given the most ample satisfaction, the most complete evidence to the world of his justice and holiness, of his love of righteousness, and his hatred of vice and sin. The notion of Christ’s dying in our stead, will, upon inspection, be found extremely weak. It no where appears that man is exempt from any sufferings that came by the fall on account of the death of Christ. In this respect his situation is exactly the same that it was before; he is equally subject to pain,

* To these historical facts may be added the doctrine contained in the New Testament, that the whole race of men are brought into a state of affliction and death by the offence of their federal head. The justice of God cannot be more clearly manifested than in this effect of Adam’s transgression,

affliction, and death, as he would have been had Christ never been known in the world. This strange idea originated in the supposition, that but for the death of Christ the souls of men would have been liable to endure the pains of hell without end, and that to save them from it, Christ bore all that vast load of sufferings that was their due. But happily for us, this wild notion has neither scripture nor reason for its support.

The death of Christ has answered some very important purposes. By means of it he ratified or sealed with his blood the New Covenant God had made with his people, and established his own character as the Messiah, as well as the truth of his gospel, by the most unparalleled evidence the world had ever seen, viz. by his resurrection from the grave, and his ascension into heaven. These are the pillars which support the gospel dispensation in the world, on which all our hopes of future life and happiness are founded; and these assurances of life to come, in themselves so inestimable, we could not have had without the death and resurrection of Christ.

Again: By his purity of life, and obedience to death to the will of his Father, and his consequent glory thereupon, he has, by his gospel and the power of his own example, furnished

us with the strongest motives to purity and obedience. And as the Captain of our salvation was “made perfect by sufferings,” as “he learned obedience by the things that he suffered,” he was by these means properly prepared for the high station which he fills; for “he was tempted in all points like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful High Priest over the house of God.” But had he not himself drank deep of the cup of sorrow, he could not have felt for his brethren as he does now, for then he would only have known our sorrows in idea; nor could they have enjoyed such confidence in the sympathy of his character; for, unless he had known pain as Head of the Church, there could have been no correspondent feelings between him and his members. But as God will cause all things finally to work for good to them that love and fear his name,

The present stormy life may prove the best

To fit us for the *haven* of endless rest.

Our present circumstances of trial and suffering will, under the direction of a gracious Providence, be made the means of introducing us to the greater happiness; if so, hence the propriety of our Head treading the lowest thorny path of human life. Be this as it may, Christ having died and risen again, we know that we have in the presence of God a Repre-

sentative of human nature, and that as he is now, such all his faithful servants shall hereafter be, for "they shall see him as he is."

It is obvious from the words and experience of religious people, who maintain the notion of the infinite atonement of Christ, that he is the first object of their love and regard. To him they feel the greatest obligation, because he appears the most compassionate, the most amiable; while God, the only real source of all goodness, is beheld in the back ground, arrayed in awful, vindictive majesty, not to be appeased nor approached but by the sacrifice of an innocent person, upon whom neither law nor justice could have any claim. How injurious is this to the God of mercy, whose most distinguishing character is love! We are taught and called upon, as the highest perfection of our nature in moral excellence, to imitate God; but if he be so inflexibly severe, so unrelenting as this doctrine represents him to be, and were we strictly to copy his example, what sort of characters should we be? It is good for the peace and happiness of society, that the better principles of our nature destroy the influence of these sentiments!

How infinitely short does this scheme fall of the engaging views which the Bible presents to us, that "God so loved the world that he sent

his only-begotten Son," bringing with him pardon and peace, "that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have everlasting life"! Here God manifested his love to the world, that he wanted no satisfaction, and gave his Son as an evidence thereof, to reconcile his guilty creatures unto himself, by delivering them from their sins. This is the grand condition of favour, that men do sincerely repent and obey the gospel of his Christ, and are thereby assured, that, "by a patient continuance in well-doing, they shall obtain glory, honour, and eternal life," and this without any other consideration than that of his own love. How much more comfortable is the idea of God and all his messengers acting solely upon one grand principle of affection and benevolence to the sons of men, thus making the display of his own glory, and the eternal happiness of the human race, the grand spring of all his actions! This view of God rouses all our generous powers into action, and fills our breasts with the warming affections of gratitude, love, and admiration of his goodness; in which we behold, that whether he smiles or frowns, threatens or promises, rewards or punishes, all are directed to the same great end, and are only so many modifications of his love. But as very considerable stress is laid

upon those texts that speak of Christ as a sacrifice for sin, we shall examine a little into the subject, and shew that the Calvinistic ideas of it are destitute of all support either from the recorded facts or analogy of the Scriptures.

Whatever stress may be laid on the arguments of sacrifices and offerings being used by the Jews, agreeably to the known and general custom of the Eastern nations, on their entering the presence of sovereigns or great men, or whether they were intended to operate as a kind of punishment upon the gross-minded Jew, or otherwise, we shall not at present consider, but observe that they were the appointment of God; that he enjoined upon the people of Israel, by his servant Moses, all the services of the law, to be by them religiously observed for the several purposes for which they were instituted. From the attentive consideration of these things, it will probably appear that the chief end of sacrifices was to give to the Jews a way of access to God. And as, under their ritual, a number of things besides moral guilt rendered a person unclean, there was no enjoying temple worship, or approaching God, without bringing an offering which should remove these ritual transgressions, according to the appointments of Moses. But these sacrifices were never considered as standing in the place of the sinner, as

victims sacrificed to satisfy or appease the justice of God; nor was there any inherent virtue in the blood of the slain beast, that could take away their moral sins—as the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews argues, that “the law made nothing perfect,” and that it was not possible that “the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sin.” Nevertheless, the Jew, on properly presenting his offering, had his sin or uncleanness removed. Wherein then lay the advantage? It consisted solely in his obeying the will of God in these appointments. If the Jews lived only as they obeyed the pure requirements of the moral law, then the least slip or breach of duty marked their disgrace and sealed their destruction; *for a broken law admits of no repentance*, the penalty must be incurred. But God, in condescension to human infirmity, joined the ceremonial to the moral law, and by the means of sacrifices was pleased to shew his mercy to the offending Jews.

Again: “By the law is the knowledge of sin.” In the nature of things, any one who seeks to be justified or accepted by offerings or sacrifices, or by any name whatever, is taught by that very act the imperfection of his character, and the impurity of his conduct. This practice teaches him humility, and speaks to his heart that he is a sinner; and if he sensibly feels

and understands the seriousness of the address, it is then that he profitably enjoys the mercy that God dispenses in these mediatory means. But it is contended that these sacrifices were typical, and immediately referred to the great sacrifice of Christ. This we do not mean to controvert, but only to observe that the sacrifice of Christ was exactly parallel in its effects with the sacrifices under the law; i. e. it is, like them, the only way of access unto God: for be it remembered that we have already shewn, that the victims under the law were never offered to appease the wrath of God, nor considered as standing in the place of the sinner, nor as being at all possessed of any inherent virtue capable of removing sin; and that we have also shewn that Christ was not sacrificed to the vengeance of God, to remove his wrath, or to appease his justice, in the sinner's stead. Then, to keep the parallel clearly in view, we shall observe, that the ceremonial law answered to the Jew just what the throne of grace does to the Christian, with this difference, that the sacrifices under the law were attended with a great deal of labour and expense, on account of their constant repetition, and were solely confined to the people of Israel, and led no farther than the holy of holies within the temple; whereas the sacrifice of Christ, is free from all labour and

expense, and is every way more excellent, as it "leads into heaven itself," and in its advantages extends unto all men, for "he is a propitiation for the sins of the whole world." Here, then, you will perceive an essential difference between this view of the sacrifice of Christ, and that of a vicarious sacrifice, which bears not the least resemblance to those offered under the law. Therefore this latter view, however numerous its supporters may be, is not founded in justice nor scripture, for justice never can punish the innocent for the guilty, and let the guilty go free; while the former perfectly harmonizes with the scripture sense of sacrifices, and is attended with no contradiction nor absurdity whatever, and yet affords every good that the situation of men requires, or that a vicarious sacrifice proposes. Here the sacrifice of Christ is not rendered a nullity on the one hand, nor yet subject to the just objections of a vicarious sacrifice on the other, and gives, by the special appointment of God, to all believers in the gospel of his Son, in all ages throughout the world, a way of access unto himself.

Yours, &c. &c.

LETTER VII.

DEAR FRIEND,

ANOTHER important doctrine yet remains to be noticed—the doctrine of the Trinity—a subject to which learned men of all parties have paid great attention, and so thoroughly investigated as hardly to leave room for any new observations. After it has been exhausted by such superior abilities, it would be highly improper for us to attempt a full discussion, and this is an apology sufficient for our only remarking on such parts as may shew the conviction of our own minds; for though we have seen what both sides have to say, yet we wish to observe, that our minds were nearly made up by attending to the Scriptures alone, before we had read any of their works.

It appears to us, in the most satisfactory manner, that the Scriptures do not speak of a Trinity of Persons in the Godhead, but on the contrary declare, in the most decisive language, that there is but one true, self-existent Being, the First Cause of all causes; and that, however exalted and dignified other beings may be, they are all derived from, and dependent

on Him, the sole Author of Universal Nature, JEHOVAH, who created the heavens and the earth, who called Abraham, spake to Moses, revealed himself to the Prophets, and was worshipped by the whole Jewish Nation as the one true God. The very first commandment expresses this great sentiment: "Thou shalt have no other Gods before me." The word *me* is singular, and expressive of one person only, otherwise it would have been, Thou shalt have no other Gods before *us*.—"Hear, O Israel! the Lord your God is *one* Lord" (not three). "Is there any God besides me? (not *us*). There is no God, I know not any." "I am the Lord, and there is none else." "There is no God besides me." "To whom will ye liken me, or shall I be equal? saith the Holy One" (not holy three). We might transcribe a great part of the Old Testament, where God constantly speaks of himself as *one* only, and, what is more, the Jews always understood him in this singular sense, and constantly speak of him, and pray to him, as one person only. "O thou most high God! possessor of heaven and earth!" "O thou God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob!" and "Thou God of our fathers!" "Hath not one God created us?" &c. &c. This decidedly was the sentiment and language of the Jewish nation, and continues

to be so amongst that people until this very day.

Considering the Old and New Testament equally to contain the revealed mind of God, it is highly reasonable to suppose that they could not so essentially contradict each other, as for one to reveal and insist upon One God only, and the other to reveal Three Gods, equal, eternal Beings. But we have not to rest upon supposition, however reasonable, for we never find our Lord preaching any such doctrine, as that he was the eternal, self-existent God, that made all worlds, or that he was God and man, &c. The Apostles evidently did not understand him so, for they, like him, never preached to their hearers the blessed Trinity, nor Christ, the God-Man, or that the eternal God veiled himself in human flesh. Indeed, we were struck with the questions which unavoidably occurred to our minds. Could the immortal God become a helpless infant? Could God die? Could God be buried? Could a womb or a grave hold Him whom heaven and earth cannot contain? Could he be the infinite, the inconceivably glorious God, and at the same time the finite, despised Man of Nazareth? Surely, if this were true, the Apostles would not be so totally silent upon it. They surely could preach as well and as plainly as any that

followed them. But now it is become so fundamental a doctrine that it is sounded from one end of the land to the other, and he that does not believe it, must be damned. But if this doctrine had been true, might we not have expected to have seen the Apostles express the greatest astonishment when they discovered that he whom they had seen poor and despised, and lastly put to a shameful death, was their God? And how would they not have harangued the Jews on the subject, shewing them that the lowly Jesus, in point of real dignity, exceeded all their lofty ideas of a glorious temporal Messiah! And, proving this, how could they have appeared simple and foolish to the wise Philosopher? The offence of the cross would then have ceased. This would have gained them more honour and more respectful attention than the simple relation of a man being put to an ignominious death, and raised again by the power of God. But in their preaching we find nothing of the sort; their language uniformly is, "Ye men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God amongst you by miracles, wonders, and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know: him being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by

wicked hands have crucified and slain, whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death," &c. &c. This manner of speaking exactly corresponded with his life and appearance; and though the Apostle who here speaks had just been divinely inspired by the descent of the Spirit, yet he says nothing of Christ being God and Man, nothing of his divine nature. Here is no mystery whatever, and yet how fit an opportunity for so great a discovery! But the grand reason why the Apostles did not, like modern preachers, constantly urge this topic in their preaching, was, that they were not taught it. Their assertion that "there is none other God but one;" for "though there be that are called gods, whether in heaven or in earth, (as there be gods many, and lords many,) but to us there is but one God, the Father,"—seems fully to express their sentiments upon this great subject.

The following declarations of our Lord are, in our minds, decisive: "I came not of myself, he sent me."* "The doctrine is not mine, but his who sent me."† "Many works have I shewn you from my Father."‡ "I have not spoken from myself, but the Father who sent me. Himself gave me a commandment what I should say, and what I should speak: even as

* John viii. 42, vi. 29, xiii. 3. † vii. 16. ‡ x. 32.

the Father hath spoken unto me, so I speak.”*
 “I have spoken the truth which I have heard from God.” † “The Son can do nothing of himself.” ‡ “My Father is greater than I.” §
 “But of that day and of that hour knoweth no man, no not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father,” || &c. &c. In these passages Christ declares the words that he spake are not his own, that the works that he wrought are not his, but the Father’s who sent him, and that he of himself could do nothing; declarations utterly incompatible with the idea of his being really God. To suppose him to have been God and to have spoken in this manner, is to suppose him capable of deceit and prevarication; for, in that case, his works and words were his own, he could do every thing of himself, he knew to a certainty when the judgment-day should come, and possessed inherently all possible fulness, without praying for it; for he that prays is always supposed to stand in need of what he prays for. If a man, in any important matter, was to trifle and prevaricate in this manner, he would be degraded, and justly loaded with contempt; and if it be so amongst ordinary men, how could Christ exemplify the perfections of God, or be a

* John xii. 49, 50.

† viii. 26, 40.

‡ v. 19.

§ xiv. 28.

|| Mark xiii. 32.

pattern to the world of all purity, truth, and obedience, and have acted in this disingenuous manner? But persons who hold this doctrine and feel the force of these declarations of our Lord above cited, and the very great difficulty of forming any thing like an answer, take shelter in a most unwarrantable assertion, that they refer only to his human nature. We say unwarrantable, because the Scriptures make no such distinctions, nor ever use any such phrases as his human nature, or divine nature; and surely a subject on which they are silent is not to be regarded as sound doctrine, and therefore the distinctions of his human nature and divine nature are fallacious, and to be regarded solely as a cunning invention of men. We know there are a great number of texts cited, and much said upon them, to prove Christ to be God, but whether they will bear a comment more rational, more consonant with the nature of things and the tenor of scripture, is worthy of inquiry. We thought of noticing some of these, but found that doing this would lead us too far; besides, we could not say any thing more upon this subject, as has been already observed, that has not been already said, and much more ably than we could pretend to do.* And as

* There are, however, two or three texts that are thought to speak plainly that Christ is God, such as "I and my Father

they are full and direct upon the subject, as lovers of truth we recommend them with confidence to the attention of every inquiring mind, where, when they have seen the subject fully discussed, they then may judge for themselves. In the mean time we would caution every person not to be led away by sounds and appearances, but to be careful to "judge according to truth:" for, supposing that some scriptures prove Christ to have pre-existed, that is not proving him the only true God. Nay, farther, supposing some texts should call him God, even that is far from being conclusive, when there is such a mass of evidence on the contrary side. The word *God* bears different meanings in scripture; men of authority, such as are one." In scripture, God and his people are said to be one, i. e. of one mind, or of one spirit, and Christ prays that his disciples may be one with God, as he was one with him. Are they therefore Gods? See John vii. 20. "Know ye not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me?" The Saints are said to be "the Temple of God," and that "God dwells in his Church," and that "his Church dwells in Him." Are they therefore Gods? "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father." Surely this cannot allude to the seeing his person as a Jew: but that in seeing the miracles that Christ did by the divine power that dwelt in him, they saw the goings forth of God, or thus saw God manifesting himself in Christ; and perhaps this is all that is meant by "God being manifested in the flesh," i. e. in Christ, in this extraordinary way working of miracles.

as princes, magistrates, and prophets, are there called gods; so that the real question will be, Is Christ any where set forth as being the only true God? If not, then he only, like others before him, is called God in a secondary sense. Take, for example, the account we have of Moses being sent into Egypt: "And the Lord said, I will make thee a god unto Pharoah." Would it not be preposterous for any person to conclude, that because he was made as a god, could work miracles, and exceeded all that had been seen or heard of in the world before, therefore that he was really the true God who made all things; and this notwithstanding he declared that it was the true God who sent him, and delegated to him these powers for certain purposes? To us it is most evident, that the Scriptures refer all to God the Father in the first place, and to Christ only in a secondary sense, as the means or instrument.

Did Christ come into the world? "God sent him."—Did he perform miracles and wonders? "It was by the power of God: they were the works of God."—Did he speak as never man spake? "They were the words of Him who sent him."—Had he power to lay down his life, and take it up again? "He had received this power from his Father."—Was he

raised from the dead, and exalted to the right hand of God? "It was by the operation of the power of God."—Is all power given unto him in heaven and in earth? "It pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell."—So that whatever he was, or is, it is all from the power of God; and when all things shall harmonize in subjection together, "then shall the Son also be subject to him, and God be all in all."

The doctrine of the Spirit being God, or the Third Person in the Trinity, appears equally indefensible, and what has already been said will, in a great measure, apply to this. We find, indeed, that the Spirit, or power of God, is sometimes personified in scripture on account of its operations and the characters it bore, as that of comforter, advocate, &c. &c.; but though thus spoken of as a person, still it is far from proving that this person is the only true God. It is not unusual for the scripture to personify things that have no real intelligence, no animate existence, such as the attributes of God, death, the grave, charity, &c. &c. If, according to this interpretation, we should make them gods because they are spoken of as persons, what confusion should we introduce! There would be a Trinity of Trinities. To us, as men, the spirit of God seems as essential to his existence

as God, as the spirit of man is essential to his existence as a man ; and, to talk of a man and his spirit being two men, is an absurdity. We might here say much to the same purpose, but we hasten to observe, that the Scriptures know nothing of the phrases God the Son, and God the Spirit, nor yet of the notion itself ; for Christ never once prays to God the Spirit, but always to the Father. What is the reason of this ? Again, we never find the Apostles praying to either the Son or the Spirit ; but why not, if they were God equal with the Father ? Again, they never instruct the Churches to pray to any but to God the Father. All this is surely not to be explained but on the supposition that there is no god but the Father only. Here then we are left without either precept or example from scripture, a circumstance which to the candid mind must come with irresistible force. The Trinity is confessedly a mystery that even its best friends can neither fully understand nor explain ; yet, strange to tell, the belief of it is made the gate of heaven, and they are ready to cry out, The Scriptures are so plain, that he who runs may read. The man that can run and read, that a son is as old as his father, must be very quick sighted indeed. If he can upon sober reflection believe this, and that three are one, and

one is three, great is his faith; he is prepared to receive any thing which those who may happen to be his teachers may choose to impose upon him.

We say, then, with the Apostle Paul, "to us there is but one God, the Father," the First Cause of all causes, the Maker of all things, the source of all perfection, and consequently the only object of religious worship and adoration; for the very idea of a man's equally loving and worshipping three persons is impracticable; one object will be supreme in his affections. It is certainly a serious thing to rob God of his peculiar honours: he is described in the Jewish Scriptures as "a jealous God who will not, and cannot give his glory to another." They, then, who worship a creature instead of their Creator, and who give themselves no trouble to inquire whether it be right or wrong so to do, may one day, when it is too late, see the folly and impropriety of their conduct. It is a strange, mistaken notion that men should think they pay respect to Christ by ascribing to him honours which do not in truth belong to him, and which he no where requires at their hands. They would bring more real honour to his name by obeying his gospel in truth and simplicity, and by joining in the spirit thereof, to worship his God and our God, his Father

and our Father, in spirit and in truth, agreeably to his own words—"Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve."

Yours, &c. &c.

LETTER VIII.

DEAR FRIEND,

WE have endeavoured in our observations on the leading doctrines of religion, now commonly received as Christianity, to shew plainly our reasons for abandoning the popular systems; and though from what has been said our present ideas in a great measure may be gathered, yet we think it necessary to give, in a still plainer and more explicit manner, our views of the faith and practice of the gospel.

We, like others, believe it to be good news unto men, and to consist chiefly in God's blessing the world with the revelation of his will, in granting them repentance unto life, the forgiveness of sins, the hope of an endless existence in another and a better world, by a resurrection from the dead. This could not fail of proving to men, in a state of sin and death, good news or glad tidings; and in order

that man might enjoy the intended love and goodness of God in the gospel of his grace, it was found necessary to prepare him for it by shewing him his need of it, and his helpless condition without it. To this end the law was given as a schoolmaster till the Seed or Christ should come, for “by the law is the knowledge of sin,” * (and not by the inward work of the spirit,) and the law was added, that the offence might abound, and that sin might appear exceedingly sinful; that man, being exhibited to himself in all his weakness, might be able to see, that by the works of the law, or, in other words, his own rectitude, that no flesh could be justified before God.† It is true, in the very nature of things, that impure services can never be satisfactory to a holy and just law; here all the world was found guilty before God; “he had concluded all under sin, that he might have mercy upon all,” ‡ for sin and death had completely separated man from his Maker. By no efforts he could make, could he redeem his soul from death, in this situation; he was without hope, all his fairest prospects were bounded by the grave, and swallowed up in death.

Without this necessary knowledge, man could not be disciplined, could not see the

* Romans iii. 20, vii. 7. † iii. 20. ‡ iii. 23, xi. 32.

beauty of the gospel, nor sensibly enjoy the mercy of God. In this lost condition did the gospel find and consider the world, and brought to man the best news that could possibly reach his ears, viz. that he should not be lost in death, but live again, and that for ever; that God was his friend, the God who made him, and against whom he had offended, and who, as an evidence and pledge of his love, "had given his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth and obeyeth his gospel should not perish, but have everlasting life." Man is here spoken, or appealed to, as a reasonable creature, as a creature of motives, and called upon to enjoy all this good by sincere obedience to the will of God; and this call is enforced, on the one hand, with an assurance of being blessed hereafter with greater felicity than can be conceived of in this life; and, on the other hand, by the most awful sanctions of inconceivable future punishments. Men could not obey, with all their hearts, without sincere repentance, on account of their former sinful pursuits; hence it is, that "men are every where called upon to repent." This is one of the first subjects insisted upon by the New-Testament writers. John the Baptist began his ministry by preaching repentance; our Lord began his ministry by preaching repentance;

Peter began his ministry by preaching repentance; Paul preached that "men should repent and turn to God:" all from the powerful consideration of a righteous judgment to come, in which "every man should be rewarded according to his works." By all which is plainly meant, that men should turn from evil to good, from all idolatrous worship, and the service of false gods, to the service and worship of the true God, who made all things. Religious people seem, in general, to have very imperfect ideas of repentance, for when a man begins to be seriously concerned about religion, and is much distressed for fear of being damned, instead of leading him to the word of God, to the mercy and forgiveness that is there revealed for such characters, they tell him to pray and wrestle with God till he obtain the blessing, and, by way of encouragement, assure him that the Lord has begun a good work in him; that the Spirit is working conviction and a spirit of repentance, and is shewing him the sinfulness of his nature, and the corruption of his heart, and that, by and by, this godly sorrow will work in him such repentance as need not be repented of. It is true, godly sorrow leadeth to repentance, and in most cases is the companion of it, but sorrow is not repentance. There may be much sorrow and sadness, and

no real repentance. Real repentance is the turning from one thing to another; and in religion it is the turning with all the heart from falsehood to truth, from the power and service of sin to the service of God, and to the practice of virtue and benevolence. It is a real change of heart and manner of proceeding, the entire adoption of new habits and of new pursuits. No man can reap the fruits of repentance, except a door or way of acceptance be opened to him by the Being against whom he has offended. A man in a state of death cannot turn to life without a way of life be opened to him. This, amongst other mercies for which we have to thank God, is given in the gospel. This glorious dispensation gives man an opportunity of turning unto God, and of enjoying a hope of life. Christ "is exalted to be a prince and a Saviour, to grant repentance unto Israel, and forgiveness of sins:" and not to Israel only, but also to the whole world. Hence the Apostle Peter exclaimed, when he saw the Holy Spirit descend upon Cornelius and his friends, who were Gentiles, "Then hath God also unto the Gentiles granted repentance unto life." Many serious people think Christ was exalted to grant repentance by the spirit working inwardly upon the heart, whereas it is plain that nothing of the kind is intended by the text, but merely

that the gospel given by Christ, and now established by the endowing of the Apostles with power from on high to preach it, grants unto the Jews, notwithstanding their wickedness and ill treatment of the Messiah, mercy and repentance, and gives all men, notwithstanding what they may have been before, an opportunity of turning unto God, with an assurance of his favour and protection, if they obey him. It seemed to us proper to make these observations on repentance, lest we should be misunderstood, and we shall now pursue our remarks on the faith and practice of the gospel.

The faith of the gospel, in the first instance, is to believe Jesus of Nazareth to be the Christ or Messiah. This is clearly the first great truth that Christ and his Ministers called upon the world to believe. And the fitness and reasonableness of this measure most evidently appears ; for whatever good the gospel contains, no man, as a rational agent, could enjoy it, without he believed it with an honest mind. Upon this, all depends ; for if we truly receive him as the Great Messenger of God, we of course receive his message ; and the man who sincerely believed and obeyed him as such, was considered by the Apostles as a Christian or a Disciple, whether he knew much or little. This, were it needful in this place, we could fully

shew from various passages in the New Testament. Indeed, all the mighty works that were done by Christ and his Ministers were to give sufficient evidence of this great truth, namely, that we might believe that "Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing, we might have life through his name." * The phrases "believe on the Son of God," "believe in the gospel," or "in the Lord Jesus Christ," or "in the truth," do not mean that if men believe in a superficial, or simply in an historical way, that Christ is the Messiah, (just as they believe that there were such men as Moses, Solomon, Cromwell, &c.) that therefore they shall be saved, without paying respect or pure obedience to him as such—by no means. A traditional, distant acknowledgment, or a mere nominal belief of Christ being in the flesh, certainly is not what is meant by the faith of the gospel, for this men in general do, without regarding it, or deriving any advantage from it. †

* John xx. 31.

† It is worthy of remark, the very great difference that there is between believing in a man and in his doctrine. We may easily believe in the former, and through ignorance, or the bias of systems, reject the latter; a striking instance of which we have in the conduct of the Jews; for while they boasted in being the disciples of Moses, yet they made his doctrine, or the law, of no effect by their traditions. They thought they were walking in the light, when they

On the contrary, the scripture sense of the words "to believe in Christ," &c. is to receive and obey him as the Messiah with all our hearts, to be influenced and guided by him as King of the Christians, and Head of the gospel dispensation. This appears to us the true sense of the terms "believing in Christ," or in the gospel, and which belief only hath the promise of eternal life. The news of a life or world to come, wherein dwelleth righteousness, could of itself yield little or no satisfaction to sinful man, more especially when he is assured that "nothing unclean can enter there," "that without holiness no man can see the Lord." And indeed it must ever be true that there can be no fellowship between purity and impurity, light and darkness, truth and falsehood, between God and the unclean sinner, as such. Hence the propriety of our Lord's words to the Jews: "If ye die in your sins, where I am, there ye cannot come." But when God, in the riches of his grace, amongst other mercies, declared to his offending creatures the forgiveness of sins, then every bar, every impediment to their happiness on his part, was removed. They then could joy in God, and rejoice in hope of a stumbled in darkness, and knew not whither they were going. This, we are afraid, is too faithful a likeness of the professing Christian world.

life to come. This is one of the grand doctrines of the gospel ministry, and what makes the gospel to be truly glad tidings to the heavy laden and the burdened mind, the fulfilment of the New Covenant God had made with his people: "I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and iniquities will I remember no more."*

The Apostles preached this good news to the world, declaring the remission and forgiveness of sins in the name of Jesus, as he himself informs them, saying, "Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day; and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem."† Paul tells the Corinthian converts that "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them."‡ Yes, without any restrictions, without any exceptions. Thus, should we suppose the sin of the world ten thousand times greater than it was, or should we suppose the sins of the whole world laid upon the head of one man, if God declared by his Ministers that he would remember them no more, would not impute them to him, but would cleanse him

* Hebrews viii. 12. † Luke xxiv. 46, 47; Acts xiii. 38.

‡ 2 Cor. v. 19.

from all guilt in his mercy, (the only way by which sin is removed,) if he turned unto him and obeyed his will; the man complying with these conditions, and reposing the fullest confidence in what God declares, would feel justified before him, and in his own conscience, as much as though he had never sinned. We might here easily illustrate our meaning by supposing a great part of the subjects of this kingdom in open rebellion against the laws and their rightful Sovereign, in which case should his Majesty be pleased in his clemency to issue an act of grace to all his rebellious subjects, offering them a full and free pardon for all offences, on conditions that they lay down their arms, surrender themselves, and return to their allegiance within the time limited, all that complied with the spirit of the conditions would be as free and as much under the protection of the laws as though they had never sinned against them.

Religious people, unhappily for themselves, have too much forsaken the fountain of living waters, instead of taking advantage of the act of grace that God has proclaimed to mankind by Jesus Christ, and relying stedfastly on his veracity therein. Their Teachers endeavour to shew them that they are sinners, and labour to convince them of the necessity of obtaining pardon, or they will suffer the dreadful conse-

quences of their sins. So far very good; but their peace and pardon are not drawn from the act of grace published in the gospel, but from sensible communications of the Spirit to the mind. To attain these, they are set to seek, to pray, and wrestle, and to attend upon means, earnestly praying God to give them to know that he loves them, that he has pardoned their sins, &c., by the witness of the Spirit. This work of uncertainty frequently continues a long time, wherein the greatest anxiety is felt and endured, before they receive the supposed blessing, and some, with all their labour, never satisfactorily acquire it. How different is this from the Apostles' plan! They not only teach men the necessity of receiving pardon, but also declare it to them. They do not direct men to the round-about way of praying, seeking, wrestling, and attending upon means, with a peradventure they will receive it this time or that time, but offer them a present good, so that they have nothing to do but to receive and rejoice in what is freely given them of God.—To illustrate this subject: Suppose a man under sentence of death for a capital offence against the laws of his country, is there not the greatest difference between one person's attempting to convince him of the necessity of seeking and obtaining a pardon, or he will surely

be executed, (a truth of which he is already convinced,) and that of a second person, who shall declare a free pardon in his ears? While the former person only makes him more sensible of the desperateness of his situation, and stirs him up to seek, with tears and a heavy heart, by the means of friends, for that pardon which he is quite uncertain whether he shall attain or not; the latter, by declaring a free pardon to him, and shewing it to him, signed and sealed, fills him with a present good, that dispels all his doubts, removes condemnation and the fear of death from his mind, and fills it with peace and joy.

In a religious sense, the same happy experience is enjoyed by a sinner, who is affected with his situation, on receiving the scripture doctrine of the forgiveness of sins; it not only delivers him from fear and condemnation, but generates in him every sentiment of liberty, gratitude, and rejoicing, and every affection that can enable him to serve and worship God in spirit and in truth. He loves God because God first loved him; love begets love, goodness begets goodness. In a word, he is affected deeply by the Divine perfections, and irresistibly drawn to admire and imitate them. We repeat it with confidence, that the doctrine of the remission of sins, being received and enjoyed by faith, prepares the

mind for every good word and work, and generates in it every principle of love to God, and good-will towards man. He that believes this, hath, in truth, the witness in himself. Instead of bondage and condemnation, as above noted, he has liberty and rejoicing; instead of fear and dismay, a well-grounded hope; instead of a fearful apprehension, or looking-for of vengeance, he has the fairest prospects, and the most enlarged expectation. In short, he is a new man, and it is his pleasure to walk worthy of him who has called him to virtue and glory.

That a sinner should establish himself in habits of rectitude for a course of time, or that he should seek by prayer and crying, for months or years, for marks and signs, or inward evidences, of the Spirit, before he can lift up his heart with pleasure or confidence to God, seems to us perfectly unscriptural; for before either of these can be effected, as both require time, he may be taken from the land of the living: of course these views do not meet the present wants and condition of man. That a man should have some assurance of his life before he can do any thing that requires much time, is an objection that never could be brought to the Apostles' doctrine. Let any man carefully examine their preaching to the world, and he will find they never set men to wait or seek for

any thing which the Spirit had yet to work or to do ; no, their cry was to this purpose, “ to-day, if ye will hear his voice.” In short, they always offer men a present good, suitable to their sinful condition. They had not by prayers to “ bring Christ down from above,” or to “ bring him up from the deep ;” the “ word was nigh them, even in their hearts ; and in their mouths.” The word of faith, which the Apostles preached, that if they “ believed in Christ with their hearts, confessed him with their mouths, and obeyed him in their conduct, they were assured of being saved,”* and which thousands received with joy whilst hearing the Apostles preach, for they wanted nothing as a preparative, but to understand what they heard.† We hope we shall not be understood as meaning to insinuate any thing against virtue, rectitude, and prayer ; no, we regard them as of the first importance ; we only mean them to be considered as the effects, and not the cause of our receiving the mercy of God ; neither do we mean that a man may have been very wicked, and a slave to the lusts of a corrupt mind the greater part of his life, and that being made serious by affliction, or the fear of approaching death, and under the influence of

* Romans x. 7—9.

† Acts iii.

these circumstances praying to God to have mercy on him, or that by receiving sacraments, hearing prayers, or by believing, he can be changed and converted into a saint in a moment. This is not what we mean. We have been merely stating how men were made Christians at first, and not speaking of their conduct as Christians. If a man, as a Christian, sins, and commits iniquity, he must wash out his sins by unfeigned repentance and contrition; he must confess and forsake them with all his heart, or he cannot have the favour of God; and although we incline to think that sincere, genuine repentance at any period of life will be accepted, yet we are fully satisfied that to let the right season of improvement pass away unemployed, and to trust to a death-bed repentance for future happiness, is trifling, delusive, and dangerous to the last degree; for however any man may wish or hope to die, his death may be so sudden, or attended with such painful circumstances, as to exclude every opportunity of effecting such an important work.

We have observed already that the forgiveness of sins, and the hope of life and happiness in another world, is enjoyed only by faith: we come now to shew what faith is.—To have faith in any thing, is simply to believe or credit that thing to be truth. To have faith in Christ,

is to believe and receive him as the true Messiah, the Son of God, and to rely or confide in what he has spoken to be the truth of God. The words *faith* and *believing*, mean just one and the same thing, and they are used in scripture indiscriminately for this purpose. For instance: "Being justified by faith, we have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ."* Again the same Apostle says, "Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins; and all that believe, are justified from all things from which they could not be justified by the law of Moses."† In the first passage they are said to be justified by faith, and in the second by believing, which shews that the Apostle used them as synonymous terms. Faith is sometimes put for the gospel itself: but, as touching our subject, faith or believing is the same in all cases: whether we call it human or divine faith, the difference arises solely from the nature of the thing believed, and not in believing itself. If we believe in human testimony, that may be called human faith; if we believe in divine testimony, that may be called divine faith. So

* Romans v. 1.

† Acts xiii. 38.

that to credit or believe the gospel of Christ to be the truth of God, is true and saving faith.

Thus, having shewn what faith is, and as we have before proved that it is not a gift, we shall now shew how it is received.—To us it appears most evident, both from scripture and reason, that faith cometh by hearing, and in all cases depends upon evidence, and the credibility of attendant circumstances. We cannot believe in any report till we hear it; and when any report is sounded in our ears in which, if true, we are greatly interested, our first inquiry is, Is it true? If there appear sufficient evidence of its truth, we of course believe it. Thus the Apostle Paul: “So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.”* The Apostle could not be so inconsistent with himself as to teach, in one epistle, that faith cometh by hearing, and in another, that it is a gift. This would be such a contradiction in terms and ideas, as would ill accord with the harmony of truth and the Apostle’s character. Some persons, feeling the force of this difficulty, rather than give up their unscriptural tenet, have endeavoured to make both these statements speak the same thing, very awkwardly indeed, as all must do who attempt to reconcile con-

* Romans x. 17.

traditions. But the scripture language of faith coming by hearing, and hearing coming by the preaching of the word of God, and depending on evidence, is perfectly agreeable with all our rational principles, and with the experience that is felt and acted upon amongst mankind, who generally believe and act from evidence, in all their common concerns with one another. God, who is gracious, and considers our frame, has condescended to treat us according to our circumstances and capacities, and has made use of means and terms corresponding thereto, and has called us to believe nothing but upon the clearest evidence. Thus our Lord appeals to his miraculous works, to the evidence which he gave, and calls the Jews to believe on him for “the very works’ sake;” telling them, that “if he had not done the works which no other man did, then had they been without sin,” * *i. e.* if the miracles which he wrought among them, had not proved that he was really sent from God, they would have been guiltless in not receiving him as their expected Messiah. When our Lord had left this world, his Apostles succeeded him in preaching the gospel, and were endued with power from on high to work similar miracles, † in confir-

* John x. 38, xiv. 11.

† John xiv. 12.

mation thereof; and they, like their master, appeal unto their works, that they had given the signs of an Apostle.* Paul tells the Churches, that “their gospel came not unto them in word only,† but in power” and demonstration, that their faith might not rest upon the word of men. The writer to the Hebrews expresses himself thus: “How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him; God also bearing them witness both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his own will?”† But if faith does not come by hearing, and does not depend upon evidence, to what purpose were all these wonders? What was this great evidence of miracles for? If faith is the gift of God, the work of the Spirit upon the heart, it was not needful, and we think upon this supposition, that no man can shew any great use in miracles or preaching. But as preaching is the ordinary means that God has appointed to save men, we see the wisdom and absolute necessity of these evidences, as without them no preaching could have affected the mind. That men were saved by preaching,

* 2 Cor. xii. 12 ; Acts ii. 43.

† 1 Thess. i. 5.

‡ Heb. ii. 3, 4.

by hearing, and by evidence, plainly appears from the following passages : “Thou hast the words of eternal life.” “Ye are clean through the word.” “As many as gladly received his word.” Cornelius, though he had had a vision, and heard an angel, yet was ordered to send for Peter, who should tell him words by which he and his house should be saved. The Bereans “received the word with all readiness.” The Corinthians “heard and believed.” The Thesalonians “received the word, not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also worketh effectually in all that believe.” Paul was “not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ, for it was the power of God to salvation to every one that believeth.” “The preaching of the Cross to them that perish was foolishness, but to them that were saved, the power of God, and the wisdom of God.” “It hath pleased God by the foolishness (or means) of preaching, to save them that believe.” “The word is nigh thee, the word of faith which we preach.” “So we preached, and so ye believed.” “Moreover brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand, and by which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain,” &c.

Here is such a mass of evidence that men were saved by believing, or outward testimony by the means of preaching, and not by any inward work of the Spirit, that we are utterly astonished how serious, honest men can read the Scriptures, and not see that this was the means which God made use of to save the world—preaching, supported by evidence. As the scheme of salvation is recorded in the Scriptures, the Scriptures are the light of men: without them we know little of God, nothing of a world to come, or of our future destiny. They are the only source of information in matters of religion. Of what vast importance then are the Scriptures to us, and what is equal to a true rational understanding of them! How ought they to be revered and obeyed, as they only are capable of making us wise unto salvation! Impressed with these sentiments, how painful is it to hear serious people, through the influence of false and mischievous notions, speak of the Scriptures as *a sealed book, a dead letter, the bare word, only ink and paper, &c. &c.*, which evidently proves the prejudice and weakness of their minds in religious concerns. They would not talk in this manner about an Indenture, an Act of Parliament, a Bank Note, or a Royal Proclamation. What should we think of that man who should maintain that a Royal Procla-

mation pasted against a wall was only a dead letter, insignificant ink and paper, and not to be depended upon, unless efficaciously applied by some foreign power? Has it not the same spirit and force pasted upon the wall? Is it not as obligatory as if we had heard his Majesty speak it himself in his Cabinet? If the Proclamation, then, contains the spirit of its author concerning the matter of which it speaks, in the same manner as every book (let the subject be what it may) contains the spirit of its author, when we receive the book, and approve of it cordially, believing what it contains, we receive its spirit, and become of the same mind with its author. In like manner the Scriptures contain the spirit and mind of God, and as far as we receive them, and they have a dwelling in our hearts, so far do we receive his spirit, and become of one mind with him.

We cannot but think, notwithstanding great professions and apparent sanctity, that it is a very irreverent manner of speaking to call the words of Eternal Truth, the living words of the Living God, a dead letter. It reflects no credit on a man's sanctity, or on his acquaintance with that book, as may appear from the following Scriptures: "Thou hast the words of eternal life." Our Lord says, "My words, they are spirit and they are life." Paul says, "The

word of God is quick and powerful, sharper than a two-edged sword," &c., and he thanks God that the Thessalonians received it, not as the word of men, but as it is in truth the word of God, "which worketh effectually also in them that believe." Peter tells the churches that they were "born again not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever." When persons, who assert that the Scriptures are a bare word, a dead letter, &c., read such passages as these, "that the word is the power of God to salvation to every one that believeth," what can they honestly think or say? Need any man hesitate a moment which he is to regard? Is it not plain that they neither understand nor believe these Scriptures?

We might here remark how much some very religious people expose themselves by the incoherence of their notions. It is very common to hear them strenuously contending for the inspiration of the Scriptures; but should this be taken for granted, and it be argued from thence their sufficiency to save without any thing else, they then change their strain, and affirm that they are a dead letter. Again: It is common to hear them pass all the fine encomiums upon the Scriptures that they can express, and, amongst others, that they are simple and easy

to be understood, so that "he who runs may read." Here, should we take up their own argument, and affirm that they are so plain, and so well adapted to the meanest capacity, that every attentive mind may be fully able to understand and enjoy all the good they hold out, and to comprehend all the truths necessary to salvation, they then again change sides, and contend that it is a sealed book, and cannot be savingly understood but by supernatural assistance. Can any conduct be more inconsistent? Paul solemnly charges Timothy, before the Lord Jesus Christ, to preach the word. But what great good could the preaching of a dead letter do then, more than now? What good effects could be produced by the bare word? The common reply is, It is powerful when the Spirit accompanies and applies it to the soul, or opens it to the mind. We seriously ask any man what scriptural authority he has for talking in this manner? When and where are the spirit and the word separated? If the word of God is quick and powerful, and the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; if the words of Christ are spirit and life, when are the spirit and word asunder? To this question the greatest advocates for the work of the Spirit, in the popular sense, will find themselves not a little puzzled to return a scriptural

answer. Extraordinary as it may appear, it is nevertheless true, that the warm advocates for the Spirit strongly resist the Spirit, by depreciating the word of God, in which it dwells, and by which it speaks unto men. It is here they oppose the Spirit, as might clearly be shewn from the sacred volume, and from which we shall give an instance or two. "God spake unto the fathers, (not inwardly,) but by the prophets." "Holy men of old spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost;" and the Jews, who rejected the prophets, and hearkened not to their words, are charged with resisting the Spirit. Nehemiah in his prayer to God confesses, "Yet many years didst thou forbear them, and testifiedst against them by thy spirit in thy prophets." Thus Stephen tells the Jews, "Ye stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost." "As your fathers did, so do ye; which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted?" &c. In latter days God spake unto the world by his Son, and his Son by his apostles, who were baptized with the Spirit, that they might be ambassadors for Christ, and able ministers of the new covenant, for they were appointed to teach unto men the way of salvation. It is by rejecting their words that men reject the counsel of God against them-

selves, for all who reject the apostles do as much resist the Spirit as the Jews did when they rejected the prophets. Whether men do not in reality resist the Spirit when they declare the Scriptures (which contain it) a dead letter, a sealed book, and thus in fact of no effect, we leave to the candid and enlightened mind to judge.

But it is objected, if we affirm that attention to the Scriptures is the only means of salvation, we make void prayer and the assistance of the Spirit, and represent them as of no use. We answer, No. We only deny that they make men Christians, by working faith in them, &c., for it is only the Christian that is encouraged to pray, or is assured that his prayers will be either heard or regarded, and to such it is the highest privilege. There are a number of circumstances in human life, such as trials, afflictions, temptations, &c. &c., from which the Scriptures, although they may greatly support us under them, yet do not propose to deliver us. In respect of these, God does what he pleases. By prayer we worship and adore the one living and true God, as the great source of all perfection, and the first cause of all things, more especially for the gift of his Son and the hope of eternal life. We acknowledge our entire dependence upon him, and offer him, with the

deepest gratitude, our best sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving for the countless mercies we enjoy. By prayer we beseech God to enlarge our minds, that we may be able to comprehend more of his fulness, and of that love which passeth knowledge : that we may know more of what is the hope of our calling, and the riches of the glory of the inheritance of the saints, and see more clearly “ what is the exceeding greatness of his power toward us who believe.” We pray that he would help our infirmities, and assist our endeavours to conform to his will ; that he would save us from evil, and pardon our sins. This is one of the peculiar excellences of the gospel dispensation ; the spirit of which is a spirit of favour and mercy. A broken law admits not of repentance ; but here, “ if any man sins, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the Righteous.”

What a mercy it is that frail and erring men, in all circumstances, can, by sincere repentance, come unto God with confidence, and find mercy and acceptance at the throne of grace ! These are some of the uses of prayer, and to which may be added, the good effects that the due exercise thereof has upon the pious mind, which, however, we conceive do not consist in sensible communications, or rapturous feelings ;

and this representation of the nature and use of prayer by no means militates against the Scriptures being able to make us wise unto salvation, though, by the very religious called a bare word; but happy had it been for the Christian world if they had confided in, and contented themselves with the bare word of God, instead of losing sight of truth and common sense in the numerous substitutes and experiments they have made use of, and particularly in that labyrinth of error, the supposed work of the Spirit, a fathomless gulph that alike swallows up both scripture and reason, and where all is wildness or despair. By the word of God the worlds were made, and all things are still upheld by the word of his power; and the bare word of God will stand and shall endure, when heaven and earth are passed away; when all these unwholesome notions are gone to their own place, and are lost in eternal darkness.

The man who draws all his hopes and consolation from the word of God, and builds upon that alone for eternal happiness, builds upon a solid and immutable foundation that will resist all the shocks and vicissitudes of mortal life, and be able to stand the test in the day of trial, when the sandy foundation of enthusiastic frames, and all the feelings of a heated imagi-

nation, with all the erroneous notions of men, shall sink with the tempest, and vanish away like a midnight vision or a morning dream.

Thus, to the best of our power, have we complied with your request. We have spoken but briefly of our religious difficulties and of our present sentiments: however, from what we have said, it will sufficiently appear how different our views are from the opinions of those who do not properly draw their hopes and consolation from the consideration of the Scriptures being the true history of the revelation of God unto men, but from their own agreeable marks and frames, or the supposed evidences and manifestations of the Spirit to their minds. Hence it is, that when they meet they are constantly inquiring of each other how they feel? What is the state of their souls? What the Lord has done for them? Do they feel him precious? &c. &c. A foundation that must be as changeable as the wind, for our frames or sensations rise or fall, are pleasant or unpleasant, in a great degree, according to our exertions, or to local and constitutional circumstances. However desirable happy experience may be, the partial want of it cannot shake the confidence, nor alter the foundation of him who stands upon the Scriptures, for "the word of the Lord endureth for

ever;" "and this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto us," so that nothing in nature, in life, or death, can affect the Christian's hope if he maintain a conversation becoming the gospel.

If the Scriptures, then, be true, if Christ be risen from the grave, and be now at the right hand of God, Christians are safe; they shall be like unto him. This is the ground of our hope; here we have nothing to fear; nothing remains for us to do but to be steadfast, immovable, and to abound more and more in the work of the Lord, for herein we are assured that our labour shall not be in vain. Respecting our manner of conducting religious worship,* you will recollect that we have made no mention of any settled Minister since we parted with

* We ought to mention the extreme embarrassment we felt in using the common collections of hymns which so constantly express sentiments contrary to the ideas we had now received; and though we tried to select the most unexceptionable, yet this expedient failed to give complete satisfaction. This circumstance suggested the notion of attempting to make our own, though greatly unqualified for such an attempt, being almost ignorant of the rules of poetry; notwithstanding which, we composed a number of hymns upon our own principles, many of which we continue to use in manuscript, and which still afford us satisfaction; and though there may be in them poetical or grammatical errors, yet these, even to a refined ear, cannot be so disagreeable as the frequent expression of sentiments at which the heart revolts.

Lady Huntington's. The very unsettled state of mind that pervaded the Connection at that period, prevented any farther engagements. From that time to the present the Society has been indebted to the labours of a few of her own members, but more abundantly to the unwearied exertions of him who is now their minister, to whose zeal, perseverance, and prudent management, the Connection is under every obligation, and whose memory they will ever deservedly respect and cherish when he is no more ; when his sensibility cannot be offended by that honest tribute of respect which we cannot refrain from paying to his character, without hurting our own feelings, when speaking of those circumstances in which he was the principal actor for a number of years.*

* The name of this worthy person was Francis Mason. He was born of very poor parents in a village near York, and brought up to the trade of a shoemaker, at which he worked as a journeyman till his death. He married young, and had a large family ; of course, he was all his life a very poor man. Though in these humble and unfavourable circumstances, he possessed a strong and active mind, and neither his poverty, nor the want of education, could prevent its vigorous exercise upon every subject of religious inquiry. What progress he made, and what effect it produced, we have already detailed in the former part of this work. His address, as may be supposed, was neither elegant nor correct, and his voice was far from being agreeable, yet such was his information and strength of reasoning, that he seldom failed to interest the

We have already hinted that we formed ourselves into a body upon primitive principles, and that we have no rules of discipline, but such as we found in the New Testament. We perceived, both from theory, observation, and experience, that neither order, propriety, nor purity of character, as a body, could be maintained, in any proportionate degree, without discipline. A pure creed and a pure worship, however right in themselves, seem not sufficient. A practical observance of the Scripture injunctions appears requisite to form the complete character of a Christian Church. Indeed

attention of his hearers. His labours were incessant and successful; no one was more anxious to promote rational piety and primitive Christianity than he. His zeal was fearless and disinterested; his services were chiefly gratuitous. Amidst many and great wants and privations he still was cheerful and persevering, nor could they ever prevent him from a constant attendance upon his public duties. He possessed a generous and feeling heart, that delighted in doing good, a frank, ingenuous disposition, and was a social and agreeable companion, and deservedly enjoyed the affectionate regards of all his friends.

He died after a short illness, September 9, 1801, about the 54th year of his age, on the same day as the learned and ever-to-be-lamented Gilbert Wakefield. The writer trusts that he shall be excused this feeble attempt to rescue from oblivion the name of one, who was the friend and guide of his youth, of one whose virtues were little known, but which would have done honour to any station.

there are many injunctions which cannot be attended to properly but in this collective point of view, such as loving, exhorting, admonishing, warning one another, rejoicing, and sympathising with one another, &c., all which imply connexion and action. However perfectly a composed mind may hear or dwell on certain subjects, or with whatever pleasure it may indulge in grand and useful contemplations, and make progress therein in private meditation, let these thoughts only be applied to active life, where many differences of sentiments and proceedings occur, which of course affect the temper—and the difference between theory and practice will be felt and known; a fact that may teach us this very important lesson, that a character formed by practice knows more of itself what it can do or bear, and also more of others, than what a character formed principally by system can attain to: of course this last is not so excellent. But even should we not stand in need of assistance from others, (a case somewhat rare,) yet if others stand in need of assistance from us, the obligation is equally strong; and though in some instances close connexion may not be approved of, yet, upon the whole, it is evident there are advantages to be enjoyed, and good to be done in fellowship, that are not to be found and attended

to any where else ; and it is very observable, that where discipline is not attended to, that either there is exhibited a distant, unaffecting appearance, not at all equal to that interest which is felt where persons consider themselves united together as brethren, members of one another, and of the body of Christ, or there appears to be, and is found, such a mixture of opposite and improper character as cannot be reconciled to the spirit and practice of the gospel : thus especially it is, and so it must be, in all national establishments. With the best attention it will be impossible to remove every defect from a society made up of imperfect creatures. This is not to be expected ; but in a body of people where there are all sorts of dispositions, placed in very different circumstances, susceptible of very different impressions, it will be found impracticable to maintain a character at all worthy of their calling, without discipline, operating upon the just and moderate principles of truth and utility, in respect of all, without distinction of interest or privilege of character. There are several obvious reasons why discipline has fallen into disuse ; amongst others are the following : the bad use that has been made of it, and the wicked purposes for which it has been applied. By many it is not understood, it is no part of

their concern; they do not see the utility of it: nay, by some the very term is disliked, they not being perhaps sufficiently able to distinguish between the mild and wise discipline of the Scriptures and that of the Star Chamber and the Ecclesiastical Courts, not to mention that diabolical perversion of every thing human and divine, the detested Inquisition, all founded on the pretended authority of Scripture. Again: it so ill accords with the superficial distinctions of society; the rich do not like to be considered, in any respect, as being on a level with the poor. Moreover it is utterly repugnant to the false ideas of honour and good breeding which prevail; for, notwithstanding all the professions of attachment to virtue that may be made, even by the better sort of people, honour is with them before humility; they seem to forget that we are all equally dependant creatures upon God, and that in religion and the grave there is no real distinction. It must be confessed, however, that the poor have contributed their share, by uncouth manners, and by presuming too much on those who, in every other respect, are their superiors, taking the most improper advantages of their religious privileges.

Our method of acting, in respect of discipline, is simply this: if one member knows

that another has been overtaken in a fault, it is his duty to endeavour to restore such a one in the spirit of meekness. If he has been guilty of criminal conduct, he is seriously to tell him of it by himself; if the offending brother hear him, "it is well; he has gained his brother:" if he hear him not, then he is to take another or two with him to reason with him; if he hear them it is well. Here it is ended, and the offence is remembered no more; but if he hear them not, then it is told to the Church. If the offender hear the Church, it is well, all is ended: if he hear her not, then he is separated, and becomes "as an heathen man and a publican." However, this only takes place where there is an evident violation of moral and religious duty, and after allowing considerable time for serious reflection; in all these cases, endeavours are made to impress the minds of both parties that the voice of the Church in her government and discipline is the voice of God, as far as she acts consistently with truth; so that any person separated from her, lies under the just displeasure of God, till he repents of the sin committed. This was the practice of the apostles and the first churches, and what is enjoyed upon all churches that walk by the New Testament. This practice we adopt not by any authority of our own,

but as members of the apostolic church ; for while we govern ourselves by the rules, and conform to the practices which the apostles laid down, we do not think that distance of time produces any separation ; but, acting upon the same principles with them, we regard ourselves as of the same body. This conduct tends to correct gross characters and practices, and to maintain that order, peace and harmony, which are ornaments to any body of people possessing them. All selfish, arbitrary, and partial conduct being directly contrary to the character and principles of the apostles, can never be admitted by any who conform to their rules, and are true members of the church which they founded. Had this order of the gospel been practised with only moderate success, what a very different appearance would the Christian world have exhibited ! What crimes would have been prevented, which have unhappily disgraced the Christian name !*

* We are well aware that unless the practice above recommended be conducted with prudence, candour, and tenderness, it will do much more harm than good ; it will convert a church into a prison house ; it will make the lives of its members irksome to them by the vexation of petty quarrels and unnecessary restraints. Every contemptible stickler will be able to produce anxiety. The justly celebrated Robinson has said, that a lord deacon is the most mischievous animal in a Christian church ; his “ brief authority ” is too often very

But wearied with a task to which, from various reasons, we were unequal, but which we have executed in the best manner circumstances would allow, we now submit the whole to your persual, from whose cultivated mind and goodness of heart every allowance is expected, of which truth and propriety will admit.

Yours with the greatest consideration,

DAVID EATON.*

ungraciously exerted, when other motives than those of duty influence his conduct. Indeed the struggles between individual liberty and close church discipline have brought the latter into disrepute.

* It may prove satisfactory to some of my readers to learn, that this small Society is still in existence, and has its regular public meetings and services. Since the lamented death of Mr. Mason, and the removal of the Author to London, the Society has been indebted to the disinterested labours of several of its own members; to Mr. John Walker, Mr. John Mason, and Mr. James Torrance, but especially to the latter, whose zealous, laudable, and persevering exertions are entitled to the highest praise.

SUPPLEMENT.

EVERY intelligent reader will easily perceive that the Author of this work has written upon the principles of Materialism, and that the people here spoken of reject the popular doctrine of the immortality of the soul. But lest this should not appear sufficiently clear, we think proper to be more explicit upon it, and to give some reasons for rejecting it, as we have done with respect to the other subjects.

In the first place, we do not find it revealed in Scripture. Moses nowhere mentions it to the Jews. It forms no part of the law; and in the gospel dispensation we are told that "God only hath immortality* in himself." Secondly, we consider it to be philosophically false. We see nothing in man but what is liable to decay. We carefully examined the Mosaic account of the formation of man, which reads thus: "God made man out of the dust of the earth, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul."†

* 1 Tim. vi. 16.

† Gen. ii. 7.

Before this infusion of life, he was a lifeless mass, and if the breath of life was withdrawn, (as was the case,) he would be just the same lifeless clay he was before. No other sense of the passage can be admitted without violating the meaning both of the words and spirit of it.

It is farther to be observed, that this passage does not say that God breathed into his nostrils an immortal soul, as numbers do unwarrantably assert, but "the breath of life, and man *became* a living soul." This breath of life put the organs into motion, and constituted him what he was, a living man. Upon this principle only can we see any propriety in the sentence passed upon Adam, "dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return." For what loss would Adam, or any other good man, have sustained by the death of the body, if he possessed an immortal soul that would enjoy greater happiness without it, when the sentence should take place? By this means, instead of its proving an awful sentence, it would be a real blessing.

From a review of this passage, which is the most pointed upon the subject, it appears so far from proving man immortal, that it plainly asserts that he is wholly constituted of matter, animated by spirit, or life; and few, we ima-

gine, will be so absurd as to argue that this life was intelligent before it was communicated to man. However, should any attempt this, they will labour under such difficulties as they will find, upon consideration, hard to obviate; for, in the first place, we say God possesses certain attributes, amongst which immortality is one. If it is considered intelligent, why not the rest intelligent also? And to consider the different attributes of God as so many separate intelligent persons, all dwelling in one Being, presents an idea to our minds pregnant with the greatest confusion. Secondly, the same arguments that are brought to prove the breath of life in man intelligent, equally applies to the brute creation, for it must be obvious that all have the same breath; for, philosophically speaking, nothing less than life can animate any living creature. Indeed this the Scriptures repeatedly assert, that “we have all one breath.”* The difference then between a man and a beast lies not in the breath, or life, but in the constitution and organization of their frames. For who, in opposition to facts, will contend that a beast has the same intelligent soul as a man? Yet, revolting as this conclusion may appear, it is nevertheless the

* Eccles. iii. 19, Gen. vi. 7.

unavoidable consequence of proving the breath of life intelligent.*

However unimportant this subject may appear to others, to us it is not a matter of curiosity or amusement, but of the last importance, for here only have we hope of life after death; a circumstance that renders revelation doubly precious to us. The great point under consideration is, whether a life to come is set forth under the idea of man possessing an immortal soul, or by a resurrection from the dead.—The rule by which we judge of every doctrine is this: when the Scriptures are silent upon it, we look upon it as sufficiently refuted. Now, upon the former of these opinions, the immortality of man, the Christian as well as the Jewish Scriptures are wholly silent; not so upon the doctrine of the resurrection. On this the apostles founded all their arguments of a world to come, and from this alone they raised hope and expectation in their adherents, and represent it to us as the only hope of a future life. Peter tells the churches that “they were begotten again to a lively hope by the resurrection of Christ from the dead,” or (as some

* What is here said will be a sufficient reply to all that may be urged from those two or three texts that speak of the “spirit or life returning to God who gave it:” if it is not intelligent, it, like every thing else, returns to its source.

render it) to the hope of living again. Paul says, "If Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain." Again, "If there be no resurrection of the dead, then they that have fallen asleep in Christ have perished." "If the dead rise not, let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die."*

It appears from Paul's expressions here, as well as the rest of his writings on the subject, that he had no expectation of living again, if the doctrine of the resurrection was not true. Had Paul believed the notions so commonly held in these days concerning immortality, this language would not have escaped him. What! give the reins to lawless inclination, give free licence to depraved taste and corrupt appetite, to indulge in every licentious excess, to the destroying of every virtuous and moral principle, if the immortal soul was at the same time accountable to God, and would enjoy happiness, or suffer punishment, according to their conduct in this life, independent of a resurrection! Such language is utterly unworthy of the apostle. All the promises of the gospel, made unto the faithful in Christ Jesus, have their consummation in his "second coming, without sin, unto salvation." Our Lord tells

* 1 Cor. xv.

his disciples, "if he goes away, he will come again and receive them unto himself;" not a word of their enjoying happiness until that period. Paul, when he was going to be offered up, speaks on this wise: "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day, and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing." Here Paul had no idea of wearing his crown before the day of righteous retribution. We might here, if it was necessary, transcribe a great part of the New Testament, to illustrate our sentiments, to prove that life and immortality are only brought fully to light by the resurrection of Christ from the dead; for they evidently contrast this doctrine with the fall, shewing that what was lost to man by the first Adam, was regained in the second Adam, "as in Adam all die, so in Christ shall all be made alive; but every man in his own order: Christ, the first-fruits, afterwards they that are his at his coming," and not when they die.

We have found that whenever favourite principles are attacked, or disputed, men generally have recourse to dark ambiguous passages to support them. This is neither ingenuous nor

wise. "Every one who doeth or seeketh the truth cometh to the light." When any doctrine requires to be supported by doubtful or misapplied passages, it causes every thinking person to suspect its truth. We are not ignorant of the objections that are raised, nor of the passages that are brought against this doctrine, the strongest of which are the following: The thief upon the cross petitioned, "Lord, remember me, when thou comest into thy kingdom." Our Lord replied, "Verily I say unto thee, to-day shalt thou be with me in paradise." It does not appear here that the word paradise means rest in death, for this, to the thief, was granting no favour; that he would have had without praying for it; nor can the passage mean that they went that day to heaven, because the Scripture speaks to the contrary, namely, that Jesus was "three days in the heart of the earth;"* and from what the Lord himself says to Mary, "Touch me not, for I am not yet ascended to my Father," &c. &c. It is somewhat curious that people should contend that here he immediately ascended up to heaven, and at the same time believe in what is called the Apostles' Creed, that "he descended into hell, and the third day only rose

* Matt. xii. 40.

again." Here their faith and their creed are certainly at variance.

The sense of the passage appears to us this: Verily I say unto thee to-day, (i. e. I promise thee this day of my humiliation,) thou shalt be with me in paradise. This reading of the passage seems consistent with the whole of the account, and does no violence to the text, only removing the stop.

The case of Lazarus is generally allowed to be a parable, and indeed it cannot be read otherwise. "Carried into Abraham's bosom" is a parabolical expression: besides, it is not said that the soul of Lazarus was carried by angels into Abraham's bosom, but Lazarus himself: likewise the rich man was buried, and in hell he lift up his *eyes*, not his soul, and prayed that Lazarus might be sent to dip his *finger* in water to cool his *tongue*, which are members of the body. These expressions render it impossible to conceive of it otherwise than a parable, and parables can never be interpreted literally; if they could, they would cease to be parables. This passage, therefore, cannot answer the end for which it is brought. It does not belong to us in this place to shew the meaning of the parable; it is sufficient for us to prove that it does not teach what is usually attributed to it. "Fear not them

which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul; but rather fear Him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.”* This passage is of no difficult interpretation; the context clearly makes known its meaning. Our Lord was here sending his disciples forth to preach, and acquaints them before-hand what kind of reception they should meet with, namely, “that they should be persecuted and hated of all men for his name’s sake,” and advises them, even in these discouraging circumstances, not to fear men, but to confide in God, from these strong motives, that men, when they had done the worst, could only destroy their present existence, whereas God could not only punish them in this life, but also in that which is to come: hence the propriety of fearing him rather than men. He does not here tell them that they had immortal souls that would be punished in a separate state, but of both soul and body (the whole man) being cast into hell.

The transfiguration of Christ is adduced to the same purpose, when Moses and Elias talked with him. This is merely arguing from inferences, and betrays a very superficial acquaintance with the subject; for when they

* Matt. x. 28.

came down from the Mount, Jesus charged them that "they tell the VISION to no man." We think no sober mind would wish to lay any great stress upon visionary evidence.

The last objection that we shall notice, are some particular expressions of the apostle Paul's. "Therefore we are always confident, knowing that whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord." "We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord."* The same Apostle speaks in similar language to the Philippians: "For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart and to be with Christ, which is far better."† When these expressions are candidly considered in their connexion with the chapter, they will be found to bear a very different meaning. In the chapter from which the former of these quotations is selected, he says, "For we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burthened, not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life." When can mortality be swallowed up of life but at the resurrection, when "this mortal shall put on immortality"? And to this event the apostle evidently carries

* 2 Cor. v. 6. 8.

† Phil. i. 23.

the subject; "for (says he) we must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ." Add to this the trying circumstances in which Paul was placed: to use his own words, in want and necessities of every kind, and forced to labour night and day; not only persecuted by the Heathen, but in danger from false brethren, with the weight of all the Gentile churches upon him.—Amidst these trials, if we admit the possibility of his becoming "a castaway," as his own words to the Corinthians imply, where is the impropriety of his desiring a safe and secure retreat? for, "blessed are the dead who die in the Lord." That he could not desire to lie so long in the grave, and be separated from that enjoyment which he so ardently longed for, arises from not considering that there is no space between death and life, and that to all appearance the resurrection will be as instantaneous as the soul going to heaven, according to the common notion. The very circumstance of God raising his Son from the dead, strikes at the root of this favourite sentiment, for, while his rising and ascension into heaven sealed the truth of his doctrine, it fully proved to the world, by these incontestable evidences, that God had provided a kingdom "wherein dwelleth righteousness" and eternal life, an evidence that

was not needful for this purpose, if the soul was immortal and could enjoy greater happiness without it, if it be true, as some contend, that the body is a clog to its enjoyments. The Scripture informs us of persons being brought to life again that were dead; yet upon none of these occasions is there any mention made of immortal souls, which, according to the common notion, must have been either in a state of happiness or misery, and must have been recalled from thence to their old habitations; and if the soul thus recalled was in a state of happiness (which must be the case of a good man), instead of being raised from the dead proving a blessing, it must have proved just the reverse, in being called from a state of unmixed happiness to the troubles and miseries of this life, subject once more to the pains of affliction and death. This doctrine most evidently forms no part of revelation, but is altogether of Heathen extraction. What could induce the Christians to admit it into their creed we know not, but it appears to have been done without proper consideration, for it even destroys some of the favourite popular sentiments.

If man is considered as possessing an immortal soul, he must either receive it at the birth, or in the womb, or otherwise it must

come by generation; a fourth way cannot be thought of. If the first of these be admitted, it destroys the favourite notion of hereditary corruption. Few will argue that God breathes corrupted souls into men; whatever comes from God must be pure. If the latter, then the doctrine of immortality falls to the ground, for it is an insult upon common sense to suppose that a corrupt mortal can engender immortality. This is not the only absurdity to which the doctrine leads: it supposes that the souls of men which have been suffering the torments of hell for thousands of years, will hereafter be brought out to take their trials; likewise that those which have been enjoying happiness as long, will be brought out to receive their rewards. The judgment-day is one of the greatest events that the Scriptures record; yet this supposition renders it perfectly useless, not to say trifling. If it do not make the resurrection void, it greatly lessens its consequence, inasmuch as it promises future life, independently of this.

The doctrine we are now combating has given rise to enormous evils. In the dark ages of Popery the sanctified hypocrite and mercenary priest alike availed themselves of this principle to impose upon the minds of their servile devotees the grossest frauds and impo-

sitions. They taught them that the departed souls of the saints were ever attentive to their deceased bodies, and that they attended those with a guardian care who venerated and respectfully treated their relics, till this notion so greatly prevailed, that people only thought themselves safe from dangers and evil influences as they possessed store of holy relics, consisting of rotten bones, the professed remains of eminent saints. This gainful trade was so gratifying to the avaricious priests, that they took care to procure a plentiful supply, for rotten wood or bones were almost as good to them as ready money—till nearly as much old wood was disposed of in this way, said to be of the holy cross, as would have made crosses for nearly half the people of Jerusalem.

To this may be added, the doctrine of purgatory, the invocation of saints, praying to dead men, &c., slavish superstitions, whose natural tendency was to debase the mind of man, and to fill him with low unworthy notions of a merciful God. But for this sentiment, none of these evils could have existed; take it away, and the doctrine of purgatory, and all its wretched consequences, crumble to the dust. Besides all this, it is the soul of infidelity; for while the Deist has so much reason to believe

in the doctrine of immortality, he will pay little regard to the Scriptures. Take away this false prop, and he must either receive their testimony concerning a life to come, or he must wander in ignorance and total darkness in a matter that so much concerns the happiness of man—for there is nothing in nature that tells him he shall live again. The continual uncertainty of what shall be his future destiny would prove a continual source of anxiety.

The pleasures arising from a well-grounded hope of future happiness

Must never gild his gloomy cell,
Nor cheer his drooping head ;
He knows not whether he shall dwell
In life, or with the dead.

But the sorrows and evils incident to human life are of such a nature as to require something more substantial and satisfactory than the dark and intricate speculations of bewildered imagination.

We have given our thoughts but briefly upon this subject, and for the sake of that brevity we must conclude. We know it is hard to remove deeply-rooted prejudice from the minds of men, which has been sanctioned by ages, learning, and authority ; yet what is here said may excite the mind to inquire into the

propriety of its faith; for it is an evident truth that people in general believe more from tradition than from conviction or scripture authority. What has been said may serve, we hope, to shew that man is dependent upon God for life in this world, and that which is to come; whereas the immortality of the soul makes useless the grandest doctrine of the Scriptures, *a resurrection from the dead*, and renders man, as far as a future existence is concerned, independent of God, for he cannot *die*: in leaving this world he only changes his place of existence.

THE END.

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But the resurrection has another all but
 certain aspect of an order in things to be
 that is, the resurrection is a thing more
 related to the resurrection of the dead than
 the resurrection of the living.

We have seen our souls, and briefly
 will to see the resurrection of the dead, and
 that it will be a resurrection of the living
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Eaton, David

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